Loneliness?

Robert
Hugh Benson

Mabel E. Brown

June 1929

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BY

ROBERT HUGH BENSON

Author of "Come Rack! Come Rope!" "Lord of the World," "Initiation," "Oddsfish," etc.

New York

P. J. Kenedy & Sons

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PRINTED IN U. S. A.

PART I

CHAPTER I

I

She opened her eyes again, at the faint sound he made, and turned them towards him without moving her head. He nodded ever so slightly, smiling, and put out a hand to help her to turn in her heather couch. Her vision swam a little at first, for she had been lying with her eyes closed for over half an hour.

"There's a good view now," he whispered, shifting the telescope a little on the baked limestone. As she, with infinite craft, twisted herself on to her knees, there really seemed nothing whatever to look at. Clear away to the higher horizon stretched the heather, purple and grey, like the heave of a mountainous wave, on whose slope the two men and herself, and Glen, wisest of dogs, lay couched beneath an outcropping rock; and beyond the heather the burning September sky; and, if it had not been that she had stared before at the far-away edge and listened to whispered explanations, she would never have looked twice at the tiny roughnesses on it that represented the heads they were after.

"There! I'll hold it," whispered Max, as she writhed herself down again. "Shift it as you like."

For a few moments she could see nothing. Heather and sky whirled up and down; she could even perceive how the glass vibrated with the pulse in his fingers. Also, she was in a constrained position, and had to move her knees before she was steady. Then, on a sudden she found the sky-line, and gripped the leather tube

tightly, moving it slowly on the axis of Max's fingers, along, and along, till she stopped.

"I've got them," she whispered.

It was an extraordinary sight. Across the mile of hot, dancing air and broken ground, a circle of vision had leapt at her from the sky, and the little vignette of stags' heads appeared no more than a hundred yards away. There they were, at least four, besides another she was not sure of — two stags and two hinds — clear against the blue.

"The one furthest to the left," whispered Max's voice. "That's the one."

Yes: there he was — a superbly tilted head, crowned with feathery antlers, staring out like a king over his domain, planted there, lying deep in heather, at the highest point of the range, whence he could survey the valleys, while he took his afternoon rest. So clear and near he seemed that she could see not only how now and again he tossed his head from the tormenting flies, but even how his jaw rolled as he chewed. There he lay, watching and watching, obedient to, and lord also of the instinct that bade him watch, yet wholly unknowing that here, scarcely a mile away, lay his deadliest enemy of all, waiting on his sovereign pleasure until he should rise again to feed. There he lay, looking his last, may be, on those glorious glens, those turquoise lochs lying like little hard pavements in the ravines, on those deep blue shadows that crept eastwards as the sun moved across the burning vault overhead; spending the last day of life and liberty that had been his for four years. Even as Marion watched him he turned his great head and seemed to stare at her. Then once again he tossed his antlers and resumed his survey.

"Oh, dear!" she whispered, as she relaxed the telescope into the man's hands, and stared again at the skyline, twitched, it seemed, back into the distance.

"You saw him?"

"Yes: but what a shame it seems!"

He smiled pleasantly, wrinkling up his sunburnt nose and eyes; as again she turned over on her back and found her old position, whence she could lie at peace, safe hidden from the keen eyes that looked out from the crest of the hill, and herself watch the long slopes up which they had climbed that morning, and resume her reminiscences. It might be half an hour yet before the stags would move; and meanwhile this was a very pleasant place in which to dream.

II

During the last hour that they had lain here, after their desperate creeping up with the sun on their backs, through the powdery heather, she had been very reminiscent indeed. All the circumstances had conspired to make it easy. First, there was nothing else to do. They had lunched a mile further down the hill; but now even cigarettes were forbidden here, as well as conversation, except in the very faintest of whispers, and this was too much of an effort altogether: secondly, it was impossible to do anything else but be reminiscent, here, on the roof of the world; and thirdly, she had a great deal to be reminiscent about. Her life had developed in a very surprising and interesting manner during those last six months. In fact it had suddenly struck her that her very physical situation in this adventure was a good parable of her own experiences. She had come up from the valleys; the world had grown more and more

sensational with an astonishing swiftness; and now there was a pause, with the prize in sight but not yet attained. The fancy had pleased her; and she had worked it out with some elaboration.

First there had been her life in the valleys, and flat valleys, at that — those twenty-one long years in which really nothing had happened at all. She had had no brothers or sisters; her mother had died when she herself had been born; and so soon as she had emerged from a childhood protected by a rather unsympathetic aunt, since dead, her principal business had lain in attending a cheap convent school in Bedford Park, and trying to be cheerful with her father, an anxious, good little man, subject to depression. She had left school at eighteen; she had had a year and a half at home, still keeping up her music when her father was in the City, and being cheerful, as has been said, when he was at home. Then the first great event had happened. She was singing at a bazaar in Kensington Town Hall, on behalf of some Catholic mission in the East End of London: and, on coming down from the platform, was closely followed by her accompanist, a man she had never seen until that afternoon, but who certainly had accompanied her wonderfully. He had begged leave to speak to her for five minutes, and in that five minutes had, provisionally so to speak, upset the whole of her world. He had handed her his card, with a very well-known name inscribed upon it; and then had proceeded to tell her that if he was a judge — and he certainly was — she had a voice of a very extraordinary merit, but abominably trained. Would Miss Tenterden do him the honour of coming to his house one day — (he

broke off his invitation to go and fetch his wife) — and letting him try her capacities?

Thence the drama had proceeded in scene after scene of excitement, and had gone on for six weeks. Several new actors appeared upon the stage: a Madame Janin, foreign and voluble, had supported Herr von Günther's opinion: a Jesuit father was called into consultation, and had nodded dryly when he heard her sing and the expert's views of her performance. Then her father, peevish directly he heard the praises of his daughter proclaimed by Herr von Günther (who presented himself, in a large flat clerical-looking hat, which he forgot to remove, one evening in the little house in Bedford Park after supper), had put his foot down, as he called it, the very first time that he heard Munich mentioned, and had said that a daughter's place was with her father at home. A deadlock had followed. Herr von Günther stamped and raved and quoted, in German, the Parable of the Talents and the Napkin, mixing it up with an entirely new Parable of his own concerning a Prodigal Father; the Jesuit had allowed that there certainly were great dangers connected with the vocation of a dramatic soprano, but still urged that a Vocation was a Vocation; and then, instigated and introduced by that same priest, an entirely new figure had appeared, in the person of Maggie Brent, who offered to pay all Miss Tenterden's expenses in Munich for one year, if Mr. Tenterden would try the experiment, and would herself arrange for Marion's lodgings in that city.

So the controversy stormed along. Gun after gun was trained on Mr. Tenterden, who grew more sulky with each discharge. And then, quite unexpectedly, he

died after a three days' illness: and the way was clear; for he left behind him, greatly to his daughter's astonishment, an income of about two hundred and fifty a year, and all at her disposal.

Such had been her valley life; and she had mused over it this afternoon with mingled tenderness and humour. How funny her father had been, and how pathetic! And how thankful she was that she had behaved well! For indeed the loneliness had not been easy to bear.

Then the ascent had begun in Munich, when the little house in Bedford Park had been disposed of, and she had moved her funiture into Miss Brent's flat on Campden Hill. And every word of the predictions had been verified. She had gone from strength to strength, after the first agonising struggles of unlearning had been encountered and passed. It was a real ascent; for it was uphill work; she could not have believed that the human voice was capable of such exertions as those that had been dictated to herself, nor that an artist's life could be one of such discipline. In her vacations she came back to Maggie Brent — that stout middle-aged devout lady that kept not only the heart but the mind also of a child — and grew more and more attached to her. Last year she had furnished a little cottage in Hertfordshire; and the two shared the two houses in common, though Maggie was nominally the mistress of the Campden Hill flat and Marion of the country cottage, and each entertained the other with humorous punctiliousness.

Finally, last spring, in a torrent of congratulations and appreciations and predictions, she had returned for the last time from Munich, and had been engaged

to sing in grand opera in London for the first time, in the winter season following.

Such was the main outline of her adventures, and they were as surprising as a fairy story; for, not only had she come up with a rush from what is, perhaps, the very dreariest life in all the world, into what is certainly the most exciting, but her adventures had carried with them new social experiences as well. In Bedford Park her life had been of the narrowest, as her father, who was a moderately successful clerk, had not enough energy to go out with her in the evening, and had had the strongest possible objection to her going out by herself; and it may be said, with practically no exaggeration, that she had not a friend in the world. There were of course three or four girls with whom she exchanged mild confidences; and there had been a young man or two who had come to lunch on Sunday, and had gone away again. Now and then also she went out with her father on Saturday afternoons to various forms of entertainments both public and private. And that had been absolutely all. If it had not been for her religion, of which more must be said presently, and for her music, she would have had no interest anywhere. But now matters were very different. She was under strict orders never to sing in public; but she was allowed by Herr von Günther, who still kept a paternal eye on her, occasionally to appear at private concerts: and at one of these Norah Merival had sought and obtained an introduction to her; and this had been a beginning. For Norah Merival was one of those persons who are permanently in love with success, and had accordingly taken Marion captive, as a future *prima donna*, and introduced her to a number

of people, beginning with her own. This had brought Max upon the scene, Norah's elder brother, and the parents, recently ennobled and extremely wealthy. Now a very wealthy banker-peer does not sound exciting: but to Marion it was all entirely new, and very exciting indeed. It had meant dinners in the "Cecil," and stalls in theatres, and polo at Ranelagh, and finally deer-stalking in Scotland — all alight with Norah's enthusiasm and Max's brotherly admiration — and these things, after Bedford Park — even after Munich — were as wine in her brain. The whole of life, it appeared to her, hitherto aloof and aloft, had suddenly stooped and kissed her. She talked now with the kind of people about whom she had only talked hitherto: she wore the kind of dresses — through the help of Maggie Brent's advances — which she had only looked at in fashion-plates before; and she took to it all, and appreciated it wonderfully. There had even been a picture or two of her in the illustrated papers, as the young singer who is to make her *début* in the winter, in grand opera.

Here then she lay under the shadow of a limestone rock, in the extraordinary silence of a still September day on high moors, and considered these things — not at all pretty, but rather charming; her little triangular pale face flushed and sunburnt, her big violet eyes — her single beauty — pensive and drowsy; her little figure trim and boyish in her homespun jacket and skirt, with her feet crossed.

III

When again she had settled down to wait, fitting the back of her neck, as before, into a convenient clump

of heather, and bracing her feet against a ridge of rock, she began to think about Max.

Young men of about her own age, with the exception of Germans who did not count, were new to her. Convent schools do not encourage exploration in that direction, and her father had encouraged it even less; and the result was that she had only fiction by which to judge. Now judged by fiction, Max was difficult to place, since there was nothing of the lover about him at all, so far as she could see. He was exceedingly companionable; that was the one thing which she had quite clear. Had he not only yesterday, when the first stalk of the season had been discussed, instantly consented to take her with him, if she would do precisely as she was told? And had he not been a charming companion all day? They had started early for the ten mile drive, in a dog-cart, with MacTavish and Glen on the back seat; and had arrived at the shooting lodge about ten; and during all this intimacy — for she felt that she knew him now a hundred times better in his tweed suit that smelt so delicious, than in his more solemn London aspect — there had not been even a hint of that sentimentality which her novels had led her to expect. He had told her stories about deer-stalking; he had questioned her about singing, and the opera generally; he had repeated his orders about obedience — and had been, in fact, exactly what Marion had fancied a very kind elder brother to be. He looked so nice and strong, too, she thought: she liked his sunburnt face, puckered against the blazing light; she liked the way his clothes fitted, and his manner with MacTavish: she even liked, what not all girls would have liked, his entire disregard of her at certain ex-

citing moments, as when he had told her rather sharply "not to bother" when the stag had first been viewed, and MacTavish was counting his twelve points through the telescope. She liked his narrow blue eyes, and his clean-shaven rather lean face, and his white teeth: he seemed altogether a most satisfactory young Englishman. Their little meal too, by the side of a noisy burn, had been pleasant and fresh; with something of a sacramental air about it. In fact, she was being treated, she thought, as every wholesome girl would like to be treated by a man, with a real comradeship, not discourteous, but again, not polite, as by one of the same humanity as her own, yet with certain physical advantages of strength and liberty.

As regarded the rest of the Merivals she was not so sure. First there was Norah. Now with Norah the process of acquaintance had developed in exactly the opposite direction to that which it had taken with Max. She had found Max in the beginning a little stiff and difficult, and it was only since she had come to Scotland a fortnight ago that she had found him easy and accessible; while Norah, at first swept away with enthusiasm, had, in Scotland, seemed very slightly to have frozen. There were circumstances, however, that sufficiently explained this — and chiefly the fact that in July Norah's engagement to Lord Gerald Arbuthnot had been concluded. It was hardly possible to expect the same undivided attention from her under these circumstances, especially when Lord Gerald was actually in the house.

As for the parents, she could make nothing out of them at all, except that they had very civilly asked her to come up here, obviously on Norah's prompting.

She had sufficiently classified Lord Merival himself to know that he must be treated with careful attention and deference, and his wife to know that there was nothing particular to classify. But she did not hope that either of them would ever be a bosom friend, even had she wished it.

For it must be remembered that Marion knew nothing whatever of the world, but, also, that fortunately she knew she did not. Her life had been lonely in the extreme; and even now, with the exception of Norah and Maggie Brent, there was not a single friend whom she called by the Christian name. It was inevitable that it should be so, for it was only four months since she had emerged from complete obscurity. But she was determined it should be so no longer: she was eager for sensation, and found it delightful to the taste; and she needed it the more since a profound change had passed over her interior life. A year ago she was a *dévote;* she had found, that is to say, in religion — even in Munich — the dominant romance of her life; now, while the practice of her religion remained, the romance had completely died, and she wondered how it had ever existed. The entire centre had shifted, as was very nearly inevitable. Music, and not only music in itself but all the incredibly exciting circumstances which in her case accompanied it, had flung open the doors of her soul, and driven without that which had been within; and now the doors still stood wide, and she clamoured for all the world to come in. Such was Marion as she lay in the heather and dozed.

IV

She had almost fallen asleep in the baking glare of

the afternoon sun, when she was roused to alertness in an instant by the movement of Max's foot near her shoulder. She glanced quickly round; and saw him leaning towards her, with his face alight and keen.

"They've moved," he whispered.

She nodded, and scrambled round on to her knees. The tiny black specks had vanished from the skyline; and MacTavish was buttoning on the strap of the telescope.

"Now, look here," whispered Max, still sharp and business-like, "we've got to follow them. They've gone down the other side. We shall have to go like the — well, very fast. It'll be too fast for you."

There was the note of a question in his voice. She shook her head vigorously.

"No," she said. "I want to see it all, except the . . . the gralloching."

"You're sure? There must be no turning back, you know. If you start you've got to keep up."

She nodded again.

"Well, then ——" whispered Max; and, after one more look, stood up.

"*Now!*" he said. "Keep just behind me."

It was, indeed, a breathless race: and before they had covered half of the mile that had stretched from rock to skyline her heart was hammering like an engine, and her eyes were half blind with dust. Every now and again, for a hundred yards or so, Max's figure would suddenly bend double, and she had to imitate him, and yet swing on and up, till her knees ached and shook. But there was to be no turning back: she felt she had earned comradeship, and would die sooner than forfeit

it again. It was some help to her imagination that she had learned enough of those movements and strategies to understand them: the bending double, for instance, was necessary when an exposed bit of ground had to be crossed on which, conceivably, they might be viewed by a sharp-eyed hind who might yet be lying unseen in the heather; the speed was necessary, probably, in order that they might reach the ridge before the deer were gone too far down on the other side. The contours of the country had been explained to her in whispers as they had all three lain beneath the shelter of the rock; there was a long slope, it seemed, beyond that skyline ridge, down which the deer would be moving: and if they themselves could only reach it in time it was probable that a good shot could be obtained. So she comforted herself in her distress.

Suddenly MacTavish, who was leading, turned his grim face backwards, and then dropped flat; and the shock passed down the little line. Glen, the shabby wise dog, was already flat under the pressure of his master's hand, panting, but motionless, with water dripping rapidly from the end of his tongue. Max slid forward on to his face: Marion imitated him, and lay perfectly prone, her hot face pressed into the wiry stems, and her whole body shaking. It was a blessed relief; she hoped it would be a very long check indeed.

Then a boot creaked close to her, and she lifted her face to see Max writhing himself forward, and the stalker, with pursed lips and glaring eyes fixed on some point ahead of him, drawing the deadly little rifle which she had admired this morning, out of its leather case. She could see nothing of what they saw, but

she knew now what it must be, and she dared not move a muscle, for fear that she should make some sound. Max was still writhing himself upwards, as flat as a snake, till she saw him settle himself, bracing his great boots into the heather, and twisting his body about into an easy position. Beyond him the near line of heather-tops stood out sharp against the blue, and, to the left, just the top of the stalker's cap, with a rusted trout-fly nodding from it like a small dishevelled plume, showed above the tiny blossoms.

As Max slid out his hand and drew the rifle towards him, he caught a sight of her, and, his face all transfigured with ecstasy, raised his eyebrows at her and smiled, beckoning her with cautious finger to slide up nearer to him and have a look. She telegraphed back for a ratification of the message, and he nodded again, shifting himself a little to make room. She saw stern dissatisfaction in MacTavish's face; but she could not resist, and twisted herself upwards.

"Keep your head very low," came the tiny breathed whisper in her ear.

Ah! there they were — unbelievably large and near, it seemed — those great and beautiful beasts, feeding like cows on a patch of green, with the obvious king of the herd apart, away to the left. It appeared to her a miracle that they should so have come upon them, up here on the desolate, empty moors.

"*Ah!*"

In a moment she was down again, just conscious that the stag had raised his head, and that a shock as of electricity had struck and stiffened the body of the man beside her. For an interminable instant she lay there. . . . There was a crack close beside her, far

louder than she had expected: a breathless pause, and then Max sat up.

"He's down! he's down!" he cried; and the sense of silence and tension was gone.

"You're . . . you're a ripper, Miss Tenterden," he said.

CHAPTER II

I

Max Merival was tying his black tie with great care that evening in front of the tall swinging glass in his room, and wondering whether his face was really quite as brick-red as it appeared, when a tap came on the door, and Norah demanded if she might come in.

Max was extremely pleased with himself. It was the first stalk of the season, and he had got his stag; and that surely was enough to make any man happy; but there were other reasons as well, which he was just beginning to suspect but had not yet examined very closely.

"Yes: come in," he said.

Norah was just a shade too complete to satisfy an artist's eye, but there was no doubt that she was very good-looking, even in a brother's opinion, and he watched her without speaking as she came across to the window-seat. She was in a filmy kind of white gown that suited her slender dark grace very well, and she carried her crown of black hair really splendidly. She was as dark as her mother had been, with the same regular small features, and vivid brown eyes, but without any sign yet of her mother's meek pathos.

"Well," she said, "I hear you got your stag."

"I did," said Max, looking for his waistcoat.

"And a twelve-pointer?"

"He is," said Max, beginning to put it on.

"I've just left Marion," went on Norah, beginning

to swing the window-tassel. "She says she's not a bit tired, of course."

"I suppose she would say so," remarked Max, taking up his dinner-jacket. "My word! She can go. Never once asked to sit down, or anything."

"Yes; she's strong enough," murmured Norah, staring out at the still bright evening outside.

"Look here," said Max, "you've got your mysterious air on. What's the matter?"

Norah nodded.

"Yes," she said. "It's father, of course. He doesn't like her having gone with you a bit. He was talking about it to mother on the terrace this morning."

Max burst out with enough promptness to show that he had a bad conscience.

"What blithering rot!" he said. "How could I say 'No,' when she asked to come, right out?"

"I know: but that's what he doesn't like."

"Good Lord! And he thinks he's modern! Why, what does he think'll happen?"

Norah swung the tassel a little more vehemently, and her brother arranged his cuffs.

"I think he thinks she's not our sort — that a girl of our sort wouldn't have asked such a thing."

Max snorted.

"Probably not. A girl of our sort, to use your own beastly phrase, would have been more likely to have gone stalking herself and taken me with her. That's what Gladys What's-her-name did in the next forest last year; only she would not let Johnnie come — said it would tire him too much. Talking of that, how's Jerry?"

Norah smiled.

"Dear Jerry! He . . . he sat about with me all the morning."

"And went to lie down in the afternoon, no doubt."

"I think he did doze a little," admitted Norah, who was not in the least sensitive on the point. "And I really don't see that plunging about on the moors all day, and coming back with a face like a beet ——"

"No! I say. Am I as red as all that?"

Max examined himself again in the glass.

"Well; but about Marion ——"

"I think it's a lot of rot, if you ask me," commented Max, still intent on his complexion. "And I'm astonished the governor doesn't see it — I mean that a Genius is above all that sort of thing — conventions and that. That's just exactly a part of her — take it or leave it, you know. By the way, she said she'd sing to-night."

"Max!"

He was hunting for his small flat gold matchbox, and did not appear to hear.

"Where the blazes that new chap Charles puts all my things, I can't make out," he said.

"Max!"

"Ah! — here it is. . . . Yes?"

"I'm going to say something that'll make you angry."

He turned so abruptly and promptly that again it was evident he was not easy in his mind.

"Look here, old girl: you'd better not. You and I manage very well so long as we don't interfere in the other's job. You've got yours, and I've got mine. Well let's keep to them."

Norah rose.

"I wonder whether you're wise," she said meditatively, staring out again over the steep pine plantation that fell away rapidly behind the house to the deep valley and the great hills opposite, all blue in the sunset shadow. "Why, there's the moon coming up."

She turned again. They were good friends, these two.

"All right," she said, "I won't. But remember I've warned you."

II

Max felt extraordinarily happy and content as he strolled out on to the terrace with his cigarette and Gerald (in that order), after dinner that night, leaving his father and the parish minister who had been bidden to dine, to find their own way to the hall. He had shot his stag; and the pleasant evening glow of the day had been brought to the surface, so to speak, by his hot bath before dinner, and his excellent meal closed by two glasses of the very best port-wine. Also his artistic appreciation, he was telling himself, had been aroused by Marion's promise to sing just one song.

The house was the result of a real triumph of engineering. Out of the vast mountain shoulder that sloped steeply down towards the valley at the northern end of which lay Loch Droom, a huge terrace had been blasted, wide at the northern end, and narrowing, in the shape of a long spoon, to a breadth sufficient to hold a carriage drive, twisting away to the south. At the northern end the house had been built, a vast grey stone place, erected round a little court, with the usual capped Scotch towers at the four corners. Then

pines had been planted in every direction, above and below the house, which gave it a protected kind of air; and terraces had been built to the north and west, resembling ramparts, the northern one giving access by broad steps to the flower-garden that looked towards the loch. All such vulgar things as kitchen-gardens and stables were completely invisible.

The air was still comparatively bright, though the sun had long ago set, and mingled with the moonlight that blazed down from the great silver shield over the Home Loch above the house, had a strangely beautiful effect, as if for once day and night had thrown their glories into a common stock. The flowers were drowsy, but not asleep, and the scent of mignonette lay heavy and perfumed on the air; the colours of the late geraniums were still ardent, but the moonlight refined and softened their brightness.

"Well, you've been slacking it, as usual, I hear," said Max.

"My dear chap, that's what I've come to Scotland for — complete rest and change."

The young man who so defended himself was very true to his type. He was the younger son of an Irish peer who had never done anything except live on his estates, which he had declared to be occupation enough for any one in these days; and he had not only lived but had died on them, leaving his eldest son to reign in his stead, and Gerald to pursue his vocation in the Home Civil Service. It was difficult for any one to discover exactly in what this vocation consisted, beyond affording its pursuer an excellent excuse to refuse any invitations he didn't wish to accept; but Gerald always carried with him a small leather case, inscribed with his

name in full, and was accustomed to inquire for this at railway stations; and it was understood by such of his friends as did not know him very well, to be bulging with State documents of the highest importance.

Max did not quite know how Gerald had dawned over his horizon: he became aware of him, soon after Easter, as haunting the house in Park Lane — (that delightful Moorish erection about half way up, built by the eminent Australian, which the Merivals had taken on a long lease seven years ago) — and had grown to accept him, so inevitably that by the time July came it was scarcely any shock at all to find that Norah had accepted him as her future husband. He had no objections to him whatever, except that he seemed an amateurish kind of idler, whereas Max was a very busy professional; he had no particular vices so far as appeared, and was an extremely easy person to get on with, with a tendency to remain, in contentment, just where he was put, which was a great convenience at times. In any case, it was Norah's business, and not Max's, and he had complete confidence in her power to manage, at any rate, her own affairs.

"I can't make out how you can stand it," he said. "And I'm all in a glow."

"I hate glows," murmured Gerald.

"And I feel virtuous, too," said Max.

"Ah! there I envy you indeed," murmured Gerald, even more softly. "Because you've killed something, I suppose?"

"Lord! What an evening!" remarked Max. Gerald's last observation really was not worth answering. He remained staring out at the warm light on sky and loch.

"Aren't we going to hear the *prima donna?*" asked Gerald plaintively, from a stone seat.

"Yes, yes; presently. I think I shall stop out and listen here."

He did not quite know why he had taken this sudden resolution. Partly he was aware that his father's slight displeasure had affected him; partly he thought that it would be pleasant to listen to that beautiful voice out here, alone in the scented dusk. Honestly he was not quite sure as to which motive were the stronger. But it would never do for Gerald's presence to interrupt him, in any case. He turned to him from the low terrace-wall, and the sight of that trim dawdler became suddenly irritating.

"I wish to goodness you'd smoke or drink or do something," he said. "But if you won't, at least you can go and do tame cat, can't you, and turn over the pages, or whatever it is?"

"Why will you be so cruel?" murmured Gerald again, who affected the feminine pose now and again. Max's irritation rose suddenly higher. It was entirely superficial: he really did quite like Gerald, but at this moment that smooth, expressionless face and that sleek, black hair brushed straight back from the forehead, and that neat figure lounging on the seat, annoyed him like a smell of patchouli in a lavender-garden.

"Go on, old chap," he said, "I'll be in presently. I want to think about . . . about the stag. All over again."

"Oh, well!" said Gerald, and rose.

"She's not a bad little thing," he added, "very artless and all that, of course; but not pretty."

"Eh?"

"Is she really all that people say?" he continued, staring blankly out at nothing. "I mean her voice, and all that? She's not a bit like any other *prima donna* I've ever seen."

"For God's sake stop jawing," snapped Max. "I've only heard her once myself; and she'll be beginning directly, I expect."

"Oh, well!" said Gerald again. He still stood an instant, then he turned and went up the terrace towards the great lighted doors, set wide in the hall to receive the scented air of the evening. As soon as he had gone up the stairs and disappeared, Max went swiftly down the steps into the garden, turned a corner or two and sat down invisible from the house, yet himself capable of hearing the music which he knew presently would begin.

III

He did not know himself in the least in this new experience through which he seemed to be passing. Certainly he had been in love, and that was precisely why he did not believe himself in love now. There was a particular kind of softness associated in his mind with previous experiences — a desire to humiliate himself and yet to patronise; to buy small expensive presents or flowers out of season and offer them with a negligent sort of tremulousness. But he had no wish at all to offer small expensive presents to Marion; or to patronise her, or to humiliate himself; and there appeared to be no softness anywhere. Yet he liked her particularly and, simultaneously, did not know why he liked her. Their adventure to-day represented exactly the

relationship in which he now wished to stand with her — a comradeship as between two men: she in homespun, he in tweed. That was the kind of thing.

He began to think it all over once more.

Old Jerry was right. She was not at all pretty in any accepted sense: she was far more like a young boy than a mature girl; and yet she was oddly attractive. It was not that she was at all unfeminine: in fact, he could not quite imagine her doing and saying the kind of things that other girls "of his sort" did. There was even a touch of Victorianism about her. (He supposed that that might perhaps be the effect of her religion.) Yet she was attractive.

There was first her little pointed face, of which the whole life appeared to be concentrated in the eyes. Her heavy dark hair formed a framework at the top; her thin lips, rather grave in line, except when they trembled or twitched, as their manner was, with the beginnings of laughter, said nothing in particular. Then there was her straight little figure and her thin, nervous hands. Really there was nothing more to say. . . . Yes: there was one more point, and that was the air of romance that lay round her, anticipatively at least, from her connection with the stage. Certainly this was an element. It had occurred to him in the forest, yesterday, quite distinctly, several times, that it was really rather romantic and exciting, to be climbing like this with a future *prima donna*. That suggested all kinds of things: he remembered seeing Tetrazzini a few years ago; and the flowers and the lights about her; and thinking that it really must mean something to be her friend. And now here was he, on the reverse side of the medal, a friend — (he thought

he might call it that) — in private life of one who might, possibly, one day be as Tetrazzini herself. Certainly that added a romance — this element of the stage: but he assured himself that it was but a very slight one.

Then he remembered the first time he had seen her, at tea one evening in Park Lane, and how almost remarkably undistinguished he had thought her to be a friend of Norah's, who usually had a more flamboyant taste. He had handed her bread and butter, he remembered, and had presently made an excuse to get away to the smoking-room where Jerry was already established; and they had not even spoken of her. True, as he had been crossing the hall half an hour later he had stopped to listen to a voice pealing from the drawing-room overhead — a voice of an extraordinary freshness and force — and it was not until he had listened for a minute or two that he had remembered that Norah had said something at lunch about a new *prima donna* she had "discovered." He had gone upstairs at that, just in time to find the girl standing by the piano and putting her music together — a little flushed and smiling, with her eyes tremendously alive.

And that was the first time he had met her; and that was the manner in which he had first perceived that she was not so completely ordinary as she appeared.

Well; he had met her perhaps half a dozen times after that; and on no one of those occasions had he been aware of any marked attraction towards her, though he certainly liked her more every time. Then she had come to Scotland, a fortnight ago; and he had

awakened on the first morning after her arrival with a distinct sensation of pleasure at the thought that she was there. He had taken her and Norah up to fish in the Home Loch that evening, with another girl who had since gone again: and it was then that a sense of distinct comradeship had dawned upon him. She was so natural and humorous and boyish. Certainly she had not exactly the manner of girls whom he believed to be of "his sort"; there was always a faint air about her of being particular about her behaviour; but she was none the worse for that. Then if this was all the tale, why was it that this sense of comradeship — for he was certain it was no more than that — so strangely disturbed him? . . . Was it perhaps the stage-romance, after all?

He got up presently and began to walk about on the further terrace of the garden, whence he could see up, over the inner wall, with the curved steps in the middle, into the lighted windows of the great hall that looked towards Loch Droom. He wondered why the music had not begun, and stood a moment looking up.

The doors were set wide through which Gerald had passed just now, and he could see right across to the fireplace on one side and the foot of the carved staircase on the other. His father was standing with his back to the fire, a thin, round-shouldered figure, more like a lawyer than a banker, clean-shaven, with iron-grey hair, rather resembling a polite eagle. Norah was sitting on a low chair beside him; and Max could make out the top of Gerald's head over the back of a chair in the fore-ground. His mother was invisible.

Really it was a wonderful place, to be set here, in

the wilds of Ross-shire. The windows to right and left glowed with painted glass; and there were other windows lighted in the dining-room and little drawing-room to the left. Overhead the great grey mass of house, bordered by the round-capped towers, rose, light against the pines on the hill and dark against the luminous evening sky. With small local concessions it was simply a great English country-house, planted in the wilderness.

Then, suddenly, he saw her coming down the last broad flight of stairs, in her white dress, carrying a large thin book. Ah! she had been to fetch her music.

He went hastily back to his seat against the rocks, having just caught a glimpse of his father's figure making a courteous movement forward from the hearth. He threw away his cigarette, sat down quickly, crossed his legs and set himself to listen.

IV

The music began with four arpeggio chords, played lightly, and then the voice came in. Now if there is one art in existence of which the transcription in words is supremely impossible, it is that of music. It is possible to describe, in a fashion, colouring and line and shape, and even dramatic art; but music, imitative as it is of nothing, must always be untranslatable, and the more so if it is the music of a voice.

It was not a song that he had ever heard before; and when he inquired later as to its name and composer, the information meant nothing to him, except that the composer must be a Pole. In itself the air might have been that of a nursery rhyme, simple, slow and inevi-

table, and actually childish. But there were two circumstances that gave it distinction. First there was the accompaniment. There were three verses; and in the first the chords were what the air itself would suggest — as simple as water or air: it was as if a child sang to herself by the side of a brook in summer. The bars of accompaniment that followed changed the atmosphere altogether, as if a storm approached; and the second verse ended in a medley of crashing notes, as if the storm had broken. The third verse was the most poignant of all, for while the air remained the same, the accompaniment coloured and transformed it entirely and unexpectedly into a song of dreadful loneliness and desolation.

The second circumstance was the voice; and here description breaks down altogether. Only those who heard Marion Tenterden sing can even imagine it. But it may be said, for those who never heard her, that she sang not so much like a woman as like a boy, with a tone of an extraordinary innocence and directness. It was not that she had no passion; those who heard her sing Elsa in *Lohengrin* can speak to that; but that even her passion was that of a child (and there is none more tragic) as her joy was that of a child also. It would seem, from what has been said, that she did not possess a true dramatic soprano at all; and there were critics who made that statement on the occasion of her first appearance at Covent Garden; but they were in a hopeless minority and always remained so. With regard to the public, there was never any question at all; and the public, after all, is the last arbiter.

The effect upon Max was overwhelming, for, of his

own purpose he had placed himself under just those circumstances in which it would be most forcible. He had been out with this extraordinary girl all day in a situation that was at once intimate and natural: they had climbed together and laboured together, and talked like two boys: and now he had deliberately isolated himself from his fellows, and even from her, with the express intention of letting her influence, transmitted through by far the greatest faculty which she possessed, play straight upon him.

As he listened it seemed to him as if she sang to him and to him only. In the first verse it was as if he, as an invisible traveller, had come upon a happy child playing in a meadow, singing as she played; as if she had lifted up her face, looked at him, and continued singing as if unconscious that he was there. In the second verse the sky had darkened, and he had seen her terrified and miserable, yet still singing as if at once to reassure herself and to appeal for help; and he could do nothing. Then, in the third verse, the storm was gone, but the meadow was in ruins, and the child brokenhearted; yet still she sang from her desolation, alone and unbefriended; and he could not help her. He was an imaginative young man on very elementary lines.

When the song ended he mechanically took out his cigarette-case again, opened it, drew out a cigarette, and remained, tapping it on the palm of his hand, meditative and motionless. Then he heard very distinctly Norah's voice from the door of the hall.

"Where did you say he was?"

He stood up as he heard a murmur from Gerald's voice answering.

"Oh!" said Norah, "let's all go down to him. What a delicious evening!"

Max crouched a little; then he took a couple of quick steps to safety; and went down the stairs that led from the garden to the woods beneath.

CHAPTER III

I

Lady Merival had one waking nightmare, and no more; and that was her husband should be "displeased." This sounds singularly beautiful in a wife, yet it was not very beautiful in reality, for it arose from a rather miserable kind of fear of him that was not beautiful at all; and it is good for neither husband nor wife that fear between them should be the dominant emotion.

She was a thin, dark lady now turning grey — the daughter of a clergyman — married some twenty-five years, the whole period of which had been shaping for this end, certain indeed from the beginning to those who knew them both well. Hers was a very delicate soul, fearing pain like sin and frantic to escape from it, counting no other form of sacrifice so great; and, faced as she was by the quietly positive character of her husband, then a young partner in a large banking concern, who had learned very quickly that grave displeasure was his strongest weapon, and who had lost no pains in perfecting it, was reduced within a very short time to an entire and quite unhealthy subjection. Yet his displeasure was scarcely perceptible to any who did not know him well; it was through tiny symbols that he manifested it to the initiated, who made haste to conform. There were three stages, the third of which was seldom needed now. The first was merely the assumption of an air, and a slight disposition to

silence: the second consisted in a few sentences, utterly polite and quiet, mentioning the cause of annoyance: the third, used in old days even to the extent of going away from the house without a word, now in its extremest instance only amounted to a retirement to his study, upon his emergence from which the offence was expected to have disappeared. And, the worst of it was, that if it were removable by human means, he was practically never disappointed.

It may be conceived, then, that Lord Merival himself possessed what is known as a strong personality. This was entirely true. He had risen with great speed and steadiness, ever since he had set himself to work. By thirty he was the senior partner of Merival and Greet; by forty he was one of that secret group of financiers whose opinion had to be taken by every Government who contemplated large pecuniary undertakings: by forty-eight he was a member of the House of Lords; and by fifty-five — his present age — he was consolidated in a position from which, except by the Act of God, he could never again be removed. He had three large houses: Brae House in Ross-shire; Farley House in Sussex; and Cheriton House in Park Lane.

Yesterday he had reached the second stage of his displeasure, though he had not yet exhausted it, in the matter of Max and Marion going deer-stalking together; and, as Norah had observed to her brother, had been " speaking to " their mother.

He had made no objections at all to Marion's coming up to Brae House. To do him justice he was very far from being an unkind father. No human being

could call him sympathetic; but he was at any rate indulgent in action, and allowed his children plenty of freedom, so long as a certain line was not passed. But it appeared to-day that that line was at any rate being approached.

Just as Max was talking to the keeper after breakfast on the question as to whether the salmon river was in condition after the recent drought, a message came out to him that her ladyship would like a word with him before he started.

"All right. Say I'll come in five minutes," said Max.

He knew perfectly well what it was all about; and before going to his mother he sought out Norah. He was quite clever about these things, and did not wish to risk any trouble. Yet he had his plans, too.

"I say, Norah: you're going out, aren't you? I heard Gerald say something about the Home Loch. I wish you'd come down to the river instead. Davidson says it's first-rate."

"My dear! What's the good of the river to me?"

"Bring your trout-rod. Miss Tenterden wants to come, too. In fact, she's started already."

"Oh! I see," said Norah quite gravely. "You mean, bring lunch and all that?"

"Yes: why not?"

She nodded twice: glanced at him; and then nodded again.

"Yes; that'll do, I suppose. Then order lunch for all of us. Mother's opening a bazaar in Mulligan, you know, and father's going with her. They won't be back till late: and there are people coming, you

know. I must be back to tea, in case the others aren't back."

He came into his mother's room with an air of grave and innocent unconsciousness that would have deceived any one else in the world. It was a delightful little room, taking into it a circular section of one of the towers, and its windows looked west and north.

"Ah! there you are," she said, from her Davenport desk. "What are you going to do, my boy? Your father and I are going to Mulligan; and I'm going to ask Miss Tenterden to come too."

"I'm afraid she's gone out," he said. "She's gone down to the river with Andrew."

She looked perturbed.

"But, my dear boy, has she gone alone?"

"Yes: she's tremendously keen: but Norah and Gerald and I are going to follow. I just stayed to order lunch. I'm so sorry: I'd no idea you wanted her."

His mother was silent.

"I'm afraid your father won't like it," she said.

"But why not? She simply loathes bazaars, you know. At least, Norah says so."

"She's really gone?"

"She went off with one of Norah's rods ten minutes ago. . . . What's the matter, mother?"

She said nothing; but looked out rather drearily and vacantly towards Loch Droom. He was really very sorry for her, but he couldn't help it. Besides, Marion was going to-morrow; and he certainly did not intend to be deprived of her company on this last day; and had laid his plans very carefully indeed long before he

appeared at breakfast. He had feared this Mulligan move, but had trusted to luck and that Marion could be got away before it was actually proposed.

"What's the matter, mother?" he said again.

"I'm afraid your father won't like it. He particularly wanted Miss Tenterden to see Mulligan. She's going to-morrow, though."

"Yes."

"Ah! well. It can't be helped. Have a nice day, my boy."

II

It was not until Max was alone and well on his way down the steep path through the pines, that he quite realised how particularly anxious he had been that this last day shouldn't be spoilt; nor how significant it was that he should be so anxious. He had awakened this morning intent on his plan, remembering Mulligan, with a start, as he shaved, and foreseeing, as it happened, precisely the moves that the enemy would make. Then he had seen Marion on the west terrace, well out of sight of the study and dining-room windows, and had hurried down to catch her. He had been quite explicit.

"Look here," he said, "I'm perfectly certain my mother will ask you to go to Mulligan to-day: and I'm sure you don't want to go. Now do you?"

She looked at him with a tremble of laughter on her lips.

"What is Mulligan?"

"Mulligan's a perfectly beastly town at the other end of Loch Droom; and there's a bazaar for the parish church; and there'll be at least forty Presbyterian ministers, each making speeches about an hour long."

"Oh! it'll be rather late, won't it, by the time they're back, then?"

"There! I knew you didn't want to go. You'd much rather come fishing, wouldn't you? Well, look here."

Then he had given her instructions. She was to put on her boots before breakfast; and immediately afterwards was to go round to the gillies' room, where she would find a freckled boy called Andrew ——

"I know Andrew," she interrupted. "He brought the pony yesterday."

Yes: well, Andrew would be waiting with a trout-rod of extra large size that could, at a pinch, be used for salmon, though it was to be hoped that the salmon it was intended to lure would not be very large. She was to say nothing to him but "Come along," and that she wanted to go the shortest possible way to the river: the two were then to go round at the back of the house, and flee away like Noah from the cities of the plain, without looking behind them, or heeding any cries to return. Andrew would conduct her, then, to the Black Pool, where the trout-stream fell into the river; and he, Max, would follow as quickly as possible with lunch. Until he came she might amuse herself with trying for trout.

"And is Norah coming?" she had asked.

"I don't know. I'll see afterwards. The point is that you're to get away at once. They won't be starting for Mulligan till nearly twelve; so it's quite likely mother'll forget to ask you at breakfast. You really do want to fish, don't you?"

"I should love it."

So far then all was well: and, until he had had the

message from his mother he had not had the faintest intention of asking Norah to come too. But, like a financier, he had seen, on the reception of that message, that he must take no risks, and just cut his losses like a man. After all, if Norah was there, officially, so to speak — (for he had no intention that she should be there in any other capacity, more than could be helped) — Marion could not actually be hauled back by a messenger, in order to go to Mulligan. And now, at last, as he swung down the steep path, with his rod over his shoulder, and Davidson already far behind with the lunch and the whisky and the gaff and the extra fly-book and so on, he was beginning to see himself from the outside point of view, and to wonder where exactly his course of action would lead him. . . .

But it was startling, in spite of his meditations, to feel what pleasure the first sight of her again gave him, as he clattered along the path among the stones by the side of the river, and saw her, fifty yards away, by the side of the trout-stream that ran in here at a right angle. She was in that charming tailor-made homespun jacket and skirt in which she came with him yesterday, with a grey Scotch cap; and was standing, when he first saw her, on a big rock, outlined against the heathery slope on the other side — a light boyish figure, beautifully balanced, as upright as an arrow. She brought the rod back for a cast as he watched her; and she swayed to it deliciously, catching her under lip in her teeth with the effort to do it exactly right. She was in luck, too, it seemed: for as her line fell, not perhaps as rigidly straight as it should be, across the dark tangled water, a yellow side showed itself half

way across the stream, with a plunge audible even above the liquid clatter of the burn, and, in an instant, her rod was up and bent.

"That's right," cried Max; "you've got him. Now then: steady." (He was by her side by now on the perilously small boulder.) "No: don't be hard on him; let him go a bit . . . let him go. He's a beauty. Ah!" . . .

He was only just in time to catch her round the waist. In her fervent anxiety to face the trout that was now making off down-stream she had turned too sharply, had slipped on the edge of the boulder, and, if he had not seized her, would have fallen off. As it was, for a few seconds he had to fight hard to keep his own footing, bearing the whole weight of her body on his left arm, and, clasping her with the other, his face against her shoulder and his forehead in her hair. Even in that moment of anxiety, however, he was conscious of an extraordinary delight in so holding her. Then she was steadied; and turned to him; for in the struggle the rod had tossed up and down, and the big trout was by now, no doubt, nosing about somewhere in the depths fifty yards away, and wondering what this annoying little bit of gut was doing in his horny cheek.

"Thanks so much," she said, flushed scarlet with excitement and exertion, if with nothing else. "But what a pity!"

"Yes: he was a good fish," said Max, aware that his own heart was beating too, and determined to be natural. "These boulders are fearfully slippery in dry weather. Let's go back to the shore and try further up."

He stepped down and held out his hand. She seemed not to see it; but jumped down by herself.

"This is simply delicious," she said. "But I want to watch you. There's Davidson coming."

III

His strategies succeeded perfectly all day.

Norah and Gerald — the latter in low brown shoes, with fringes hanging over the instep, and entirely useless for dealing with the stones — turned up in a leisurely manner about twelve, and after watching Max for a little, who had fished the Black Pool from end to end without a rise, announced that they would go up the trout-stream to a particular camping-place with proper stones to sit down on, and be ready for lunch at one. Andrew was despatched with them to attend on Norah, who announced that Gerald was to have his first lesson in catching trout.

"But I don't want them, anyhow," remonstrated Gerald.

"Wait till you catch them, old chap," said Max. "And, by the way, if you happen to come across a two-pounder with a . . . a Black Gnat in his mouth, that'll be Miss Tenterden's friend."

"We'll remember," said Norah over her shoulder. "Come along, Jerry."

If it had been pleasant to see Marion against the water and the heather, it was still more pleasant to the male mind of this young man to know that he was being seen by her. He suggested her sitting down on the heather, forty yards behind, so as to be out

of the reach of his fly; but he was simply delighted when she said she couldn't see the water from there.

"Very well, then; you'll have to keep quite close: that's the only other safe place."

How adequate and competent she was, too, in that position! She never spoke except when he spoke first, and then answered very shortly: but her eyes shone with attentive interest, and there was continually on her lips, when he caught a glimpse of her, that tremulousness of laughter or excitement. Above all, there was absolutely no posing about her; no attempt to appear interested in order to be interesting; she was simply absorbed in the thing itself, and honestly wanted to get every thrill that was to be obtained. At the tail of the second pool, there had suddenly emerged over his fly a great silvery body, plunging back without the faintest touch on the line.

"Ah! he's only playing with it," said Max.

He looked at her as he spoke, and was amazed by the excitement in her face. She had made no sound; but her eyes were alight, and her face gone pale.

"Try him again," she said.

It was all wrong: but he could not resist her appeal. Once, twice and three times he steered his gaudy fly among the wrinkled, swirling surfaces, and there was no response.

"I should have waited," he murmured.

"Oh! was it my fault for asking?"

He smiled at her.

"Well: how could I say No?" he asked. "But five minutes is the proper time."

She was already apologetic as they made their way up to the lunching place.

"I'm perfectly ashamed of myself," she said. "And after all my resolutions not to interrupt!"

"But it very often does answer, to cast again at once," he said.

"But you said five minutes: and I saw it in a book in my room last night, too."

"Well: he was only playing with it, anyhow. I know his little game. It's a regular trick — when they're feeling cheerful but not hungry."

The lunching party apparently consisted of one female figure, when the two came in sight of the boulders. Norah was there, sure enough, disposing plates in a circle; but there was no sign of Gerald or Andrew.

"Where's Jerry?" cried Max.

"He's here," said a grave voice; and a head rose from between two large stones, as if decapitated. Then the remainder of him followed.

"You've been resting again," said Max severely.

"It's what I've come to Scotland for," remonstrated the other. "We public men have a duty to our country, you know. Lunch ready?"

"I've sent Andrew for some sticks to make a fire," said Norah. "They've put the coffee in a cracked Thermos; and it's frozen stiff, so to speak. Come on, Jerry: be a little gentleman for once, and hand round the chicken."

Max's strategies were as successful after lunch, as before.

They all sat awhile on the warm stones first, while

the coffee was brought back to some semblance of heat on the fire kindled by Andrew, and then while they drank it. Then Gerald, suddenly galvanised into energy, proposed that Andrew should be caused to build a small cairn of stones on a boulder that jutted into the stream, with an empty claret bottle on the top, and that the company should all throw pebbles at it.

"And the one who hits the bottle shall have the extra cup of coffee, if there is one," he explained. "We do that at Somerset House, sometimes, with corks, after lunch."

"No wonder you want rest," said Max. "But you'll do nothing of the sort here. That pool's where you've got to catch a fish afterwards; and where do you suppose all the fish would be if you threw stones?"

"I'd much sooner break a bottle," murmured Gerald.

"Miss Tenterden shall show you how to do it. You must watch her very carefully, Jerry, and then imitate her afterwards."

The programme was carried out. Marion was unfeignedly anxious to do some fishing on her own account; and on hearing that it would really do the salmon-river good to give it a rest for an hour or so, fervently consented to fish while the others looked on. Max, who did not in the least want to talk to Jerry and Norah, and still less to Andrew or Davidson, retired to the bank above the boulders, and settled down to watch her. The day was gently clouded over, but it was none the less lovely; for the clouds were broken, and there shone out wonderful gleams of colour on the deep peat-stained water, the brilliant green here and there at the edge of the stream, the mystical purples and browns of the heather beyond, and the great grey rocks rising like

ruins above the deeper pools. It really seemed incredible that any section of human society, for any purpose whatever, however high and sacred, should deliberately elect to dress itself up and hold a bazaar, and make speeches. Mulligan itself was invisible from the low level of the river; but it was possible, if one stood up to see the hills beneath which it lay, and even make out the skein of smoke that hung over it. And to think that Marion might have been there, instead of standing here at liberty, with the noise of the tumbling water in her ears, and the breeze in her hair, and, what was still more important to Max, presenting to his eyes that same charming slender outline that he had seen as he came up the path this morning.

Twice during the next hour he had interrupted the spectacle by going down to help her to land a fish, taking the net from Andrew for that purpose. At the third she turned to him, with a great content in her face.

"There!" she said. "I've caught three: and that's what I set myself to do. And I'm not going to fish any more; but I'm coming to watch you if I may. Lord Gerald can take my place."

Max's heart gave a distinct beat of pleasure. He had been beginning to wonder when he would be alone with her again; and yet he scarcely knew why he wished it so much.

"Jerry," he cried. "Come along. It's your turn. Make him come, Norah."

Norah turned from the patch of coarse grass where she had been sitting rather silent, chewing stems.

"Come on," she said. Then she turned to the others,

and stood up. "What are you two going to do?"

"We're going down to fish the Black Pool again," said Max, "before we go to the others."

"Oh! Shall we come too?"

"Exactly as you please," observed Max, with bitterness in his heart.

"But how cordial! Well, we won't. Perhaps we'll call for you later. Come on, Jerry."

A head raised itself from the warm pebbles.

"Let Miss Tenterden go on doing it," it said. "She does it far better than I can."

"Well; you've got to learn," bawled Max above the roar of the water, infinitely happy again. "Norah means it this time."

"Oh! Well," said Jerry, getting up.

IV

A great melancholy fell on Max at dinner that night, and he tried to pretend to himself that it resulted from the boredom that he found in the company of the new guests.

These were four in number — Mrs. Pakenham-Flax and her two daughters, the Misses Pakenham-Flax — persons who, Max bitterly declared, resembled rabbits, not only in appearance, but in mind also; and Captain Moreton, about whom there is really nothing to be said at all, since he appeared not to have an idea or an aspect in the world to differentiate him from the Least Common Multiple of all captains. Max himself was not clever, but he was a sage beside Captain Moreton who could be relied upon to say and do all the things expected of him under any conceivable circumstances. He was asked here, apparently, on the supposition that he was

a friend of Gerald's; but Gerald, in private conversation with Max in the smoking-room before dinner, entirely repudiated the supposition, and declared that, if he must really tell the truth, the man always seemed to him more than a bit of a bounder; and Max, with sinking heart, realised that it was himself who would have to entertain him.

The conversation at dinner, then, was adapted to the new company. Music was not even mentioned from beginning to end; while the bazaar, the deer-forest, the time-table of the Caledonian Railway, the salmon that Max had caught to-day, and the five trout which the two girls had contributed between them, were discussed in all their bearings. Norah quite saw Max's point about the rabbit-aspect of the Pakenham-Flax family, and even began a rather pointed sentence about salad, when a silence fell.

When the men got up in the usual desultory way, to go into the hall, once more Max slipped out. Certainly he wanted to talk to Marion again, whom he had regarded during the dinner between two clumps of *spiræa;* in fact he wanted it with a vehemence that surprised himself; but he was quite clear that he did not want to see her talk to Captain Moreton, on one side of whom she had sat at dinner. Sooner than that, he would prefer to think about her in the garden. Anyhow he had to face the knowledge that she would be on her way to the station before the world got up to breakfast next morning; and he was only now beginning to learn that this was a considerable matter. They would, presumably, not meet again till the winter. The fact that she was going so soon really had not impressed itself very

deeply on his mind so far; the day had been too joyous and natural for him to make much of it; but it had come to him, as he dressed, with a peculiar poignancy, that this was the last time she would be at dinner at all; and that if she did not sing again to-night, he would not hear her sing at all — at least, until the winter.

He was in the same seat as last night, when he suddenly heard her talking on the terrace over his head, some ten minutes later; and stood up. Then he heard Captain Moreton's voice in answer; and advanced a step or two. He was not going to stand that, he told himself. But he saw that his indignation was unjust: for it was obvious that every one had come out together, into the dusky evening. Mrs. Pakenham-Flax's head went past as he looked, and his father's beyond it; and he could hear Gerald murmuring away somewhere in the background. Then he heard his father call to Captain Moreton: and saw that Marion was alone.

"Come down here," he said.

It was only ten minutes that he had; and he did not say one word in that ten minutes that his father might not have heard; but it was in the undertones of his voice, and the scent of the mignonette, and the peculiar mingled lights of night and day that the significance lay. She sat beside him, as simply as a child: and they spoke of the salmon he had caught, and how she had had the gaff till Davidson wanted it; and the train she had to catch next morning; and where she would lunch. And then, abruptly, he spoke of the Opera and her first appearance.

"It'll be early in the New Year," she said. "Harri-

son is going to try a month of Wagner: and I'm engaged for Elsa."

"You'll let me know, won't you?" he said. "I'm rather out of those things. I don't believe I've ever seen *Lohengrin* in my life."

There was but one sentence, perhaps, which, on consideration afterwards, he thought that perhaps his father would be better without hearing.

"I wish you weren't going," he said.

CHAPTER IV

I

It was not until Marion was in the dark little pill-box of a carriage, on the second evening after her leaving Brae House, on her patient way from the Hertfordshire station of Standing to her country cottage, that she felt she could begin to reckon up her experiences.

She had reached London in the small hours, the night before, and had slept at the Campden Hill flat. Maggie Brent was away in Somersetshire, visiting an aunt. (This always seemed to Marion slightly humorous, just because Maggie was extremely aunt-like herself.) She had slept till late: she had then lunched with the von Günthers, had received some very particular instructions from the Professor in his music-room afterwards; had done a little necessary shopping, and had then caught the six-five from Liverpool Street. It had been a whirl all the time, and she had not been able to reflect much. Now, however, she would have a couple of days alone, before Maggie came down to her; and would really be able to arrange her thoughts.

She was extremely tired; and the shaggy brown pony, hired in the village, with the trap he drew, seemed slower than ever. She closed her eyes soon after leaving the station; and, as soon as she did that, small vignettes of vision began to form themselves. At first they were snatches from her day in London: then of the train

journey and the yellowing woods that wheeled and fled past; and, at last, of Brae House and her experiences there.

It was the river chiefly that presented itself before her — the laced and tangled skeins of water, snapped into froth by the boulders; the pools left by the drought among the bleached stones at the riverside; the pine plantations that sloped up towards the house. Then, by an act of memory she brought back the deer-stalking adventure; and, obediently, there began to defile before her the great rounded shoulders of the moor; the deep shadowed valleys beneath — (What were they called in Scotland? Corries, wasn't it?) — the far blue hills. At first it was of such scenes as these only that she thought — just plain Nature; but it was not long before a man's figure began to make its appearance before her — a figure, with a sunburnt face, in a tweed shooting-suit and heavy boots; a face with frank blue eyes puckered a little with staring against sun and wind. . . . Then she opened her own eyes suddenly, and saw the prosaic back of old Mr. Bentham who drove her, and the glimmer of the lamps on his ancient buttons.

She believed herself to be perfectly sensible; and she was, at any rate, so far sensible as to realise that her first introduction to the world — (for such those last few months had been to her) — was bound to seem more exciting than it deserved. After all, Max Merival really was the first male person of her own age who had ever approached her on her sympathetic side; and she recognised that a considerable discount must be allowed for this. Besides, obviously, the whole thing was the merest comradeship, exactly what she had always pro-

claimed to Maggie as her ideal of a relationship, a relationship usually impossible with a man for evident reasons, and to be sought for therefore with a woman only. What was it he had said to her, the night before last, in the mignonette-scented garden? — (the night before last! Was it so short a while ago as that?) — It was only that he wished she wasn't going. Well; and she had wished it too. What possible harm was there in this? Finally she reflected, with a curious sensation of hardening about her heart, that he was after all the only son of a peer, with large estates; and she, an opera singer who had not yet made her name. And at that reflection she brought down her will with a bang: and set herself to think about the Bechstein grand that Professor von Günther had caused to be sent down to her cottage. That was her job now; and holidays were over.

II

After supper that evening, cooked with surprising adequateness by the small country girl who was the entire staff at Standing, except when Mrs. Grant, the housekeeper at Campden Hill, came down with Maggie Brent; she went into the big music-room, once a barn, but now floored and boarded to a state of satisfactory dryness, to see the piano. There it was in all its glory, of black wood that gave back a glimmer of the two candles in a way exceedingly like that in which a deep pool reflects light — say a salmon-river in Scotland. She set down her third candle on the top, and then snatched it away again, and blew it out, for she was healthily superstitious about such things. Then

she turned the key, all ready in its place, put back the lid, sat down and began to play *arpeggi*, letting her eyes roam round the shadowy room.

Yes: it was really nice to be home again, after all — among her own things. It was not that this room held a great many of them; she valued space in her music-room too much for that. There was but one rug on the stained floor, in front of the stove that Maggie had put in for her, with three arm-chairs ranged about. There was a big oak chest for music, rather inconvenient, as one had to lift the lid and very nearly dive within to get anything out; but it looked nice. There were half a dozen water-colours on the brown-papered walls; there were three or four screens to keep off draughts; there was a small gate-leg table in the middle of the room; there was a low set of book-shelves by the stove; and there was really nothing else at all, but empty air and the dark oak beams of walls and roof. Yes; it was a satisfactory room; and she was pleased to be home again.

Then, as she meditated, on a flash of thought, she modulated, came down to the key of E natural, and broke with full voice into the one song she had sung at Brae House. She sang it with vehemence, loving to hear the air ring with her own voice. It was an abrupt shock to her to hear the door open as she ended.

"If you please, miss, Father Denny is here, and says he's very sorry, but would you speak him one minute, please, miss."

She wheeled on her stool, and confronted the round and adoring face of Jenny, with her sleeves rolled up for washing.

"Father Denny? Oh, yes! Ask him to come in. And, Jenny, when you open the door, try to remember to roll down your sleeves."

"Yes, miss: but I didn't think that any one ——"

"That's all right. Show Father Denny in, my dear."

It was a quiet little figure that came in, rather nervous and doubtful as to whether it was quite proper to call upon a lonely lady at such an hour. He began to apologise.

"I heard you were home, Miss Tenterden; and I thought I might just look in. It's rather urgent; or I wouldn't have troubled you at such an hour."

"But I'm delighted, Father. Do sit down. Will you have some coffee?"

"You're very kind: but it's much too late."

"No: please sit down. Jenny, bring in a cup of coffee for Father Denny."

He was a most excellent priest, this, rather timid in feminine society, but entirely zealous and conscientious, and, oddly enough, extremely effective with his men and boys, who appeared to look on him with the greatest affection: Marion could never understand why. Yet, there it was.

It appeared that there was a difficulty about a server at mass to-morrow. (Marion's heart sank suddenly. She had proposed to herself to breakfast in bed.) Tim Gallagher was ill; and Tom Somebody Else had been taken to the seaside by his uncle; and the priest's own housekeeper had a bad cold. So would Miss Tenterden be so very good as to answer mass to-morrow? Really, he did not know whom else to ask: Jenny, he under-

stood, was not yet proficient in her Latin pronunciation.

"Why, of course, Father," said Marion. "At eight o'clock, isn't it?"

The priest instantly rose.

"Well: that's most kind of you," he said. "I wouldn't have troubled you at such a time——"

"No: but do sit down again, Father. You haven't drunk your coffee."

"My dear Miss Tenterden, I shouldn't sleep if I did."

She tried to tell him about Scotland; but he would have none of it. Obviously he felt he had already transgressed up to the very brink of propriety. He edged towards the door, even as she spoke.

("Very well: if you won't, you won't," said Marion to herself.)

"Good night, Miss Tenterden: and thank you a thousand times. I'll see to all the vestments myself. It's simply to answer the mass, you understand; from your own seat will do perfectly well."

When he was gone again, Marion sat down before the stove. She had just made another discovery.

Six months ago such an invitation as this would have thrilled her. She remembered the first time, as a convent-girl, she had been asked to answer the mass of a strange priest who came to the school, and the extraordinary sense of romance it had given her, to minister there, in a sense, at the very altar of God. In last spring, again, she had answered Father Denny's mass on two or three occasions like this, and the romance had still been there. But now it was gone. Why?

Her religion had been a very ardent and individual

matter indeed, and very far from superficial. The Personages of her Faith had been as real to her as any human beings — above all the Supreme Divine Personage Himself — even more real at times, since they were always present and others were not. The Tabernacle was to her the actual audience-chamber of the King. . . . There had been times when even the sight of a Catholic church in the countryside, or of its door in London streets, had been a distinct sensation. Her first spontaneous emotion on hearing that she had an extraordinary gift in her voice had precipitated itself in a resolution to sing to the greater glory of God. She had had a short terror, from which, indeed, she did not recoil, that it might be she would have to be a nun and sing in the chapel. And, it must emphatically be remembered, this devotion was not essentially in the least a devotion to an artistic system or worship, or the mere result of association and teaching: it had a very definite Personal Object with whom she was on as romantic terms as a creature can be with an Incarnate Creator. Such phrases as: "Let Him kiss me with the kiss of His mouth" . . . "As the apple-tree among the trees of the wood; so is my Beloved among the sons" . . . "The voice of my Beloved knocking: Open to me, my sister, my love, my undefiled"— phrases such as these, applied and consecrated through centuries to the love between Christ and the soul, had expressed with reality the passion that her religion awakened in her. The drama which the Catholic Church presents to her children at such times as Christmas and Lent and Easter had been far more than a drama to her. The Child in the Crib was her lover grown little again; with the daughters of Jerusalem she watched that same Lover

go by in His blood and tears to Calvary: with those same daughters she waited in the dawn-lit garden to see Him come forth as a Giant.

Her religion then, a year or two ago, had truly been the passion of her life. As soon as she had seen this cottage in Standing village she had determined it must be hers, for the tiny apse of the little church actually abutted on to her garden at the back; and she had chosen her room upstairs and moved the bed in it, so that, as she lay there, she could see the glimmer of the sanctuary-lamp that marked His Presence. She had said little or nothing of all this to any one except, very rarely, to her confessor: her father, she knew, had thought her piety to be merely that of an emotional schoolgirl.

And now ——!

She stood up suddenly and went to the uncurtained, diamond-paned window of the music-room. There burned the light across the dusk — a patch of jewelled colour through the stained window of the apse. Yet it awakened no emotion at all. Her will still held to her old faith: there was not the faintest intellectual veil drawn between her and its apprehension. Yet her heart seemed blind.

III

Maggie Brent arrived on the Monday evening.

In appearance she was not at all striking; and even in her conversation she was not in the general sense distinguished, except by some peculiar characteristics of her own. Yet it was extraordinary how comforting was her presence.

She was aged about forty-five; she was stoutish; she had a large, pale face with a spot of colour composed of tiny red veins on either cheek-bone; she dressed in black or dove-grey, with a necklace of large blue stones over her dress, and wore a flat kind of hat that usually sagged on one side. She had become a Catholic suddenly and unexpectedly twenty years ago; and had pursued her religion like a vocation ever since. In London she was a member of a society that visited servant-maids in the afternoon; and she would appear at meetings of social guilds in a state of extreme enthusiasm and complete ignorance with regard to what it was all about, yet with a burning certitude that it was all very important and helpful and uplifting. No one except servants called her Miss Brent; and even some of them called her Miss Maggie.

"My dearest!" she cried, as she ran in from the door of the pill-box carriage, up the little paved path and into the cottage door, where Marion awaited her out of the rain. A long scarf streamed from one shoulder, and dragged in the wet behind.

"Yes: bring them all in, please, Mr. Bentham," she began from the shelter of the porch so soon as she had embraced Marion, pulled her into the tiny hall to embrace her once more, and then run back again, leaving her. "And please put the bandbox under your — oh! how clever of you to keep it from the rain like that. Thank you so much. And don't shake the parrot's cage more than you can help, because he doesn't like it; and he'll be swearing dreadfully all the evening, as it is. . . . Thank you so much, Mr. Bentham: yes, I think

that's really all. Oh! no: there are two umbrellas still in the carriage. I'll get them ——"

"No, you shan't," said Marion, seizing her.

"Oh! well: perhaps — there! Mr. Bentham's got them after all. Thank you so much, Mr. Bentham. Good night. I hope you won't catch cold. Good night, Mr. Bentham. Thank you."

It was an entirely characteristic arrival, and Marion's heart warmed and danced within her. There were eleven separate articles spread about the hall and on the chest, so soon as the door was finally shut. They were as follows: — one large truck; three handbags; a parrot's cage; two umbrellas slipping from their confining strap; a bandbox; a case for golf-clubs, with one golf-club and a quantity of autumn branches sticking out of it; a jewel-case; a hold-all, bulging with repletion; and a brown-paper bag which Miss Brent had set down herself in order to embrace Marion.

"What in the world have you brought those branches for?" asked the girl delightedly.

"Well, you see, they looked so lovely in the hedge as I drove to the station this morning. Perhaps it was rather foolish of me, as I was coming to the country again, but I didn't think of that. And then I didn't like to throw them away. Don't throw them away, Marion, will you? Poor things, they looked so unhappy in the train: I felt quite cruel. We must make it up to them now. Oh! there's Rhadamanthus beginning to swear. I knew he would, as soon as he saw the light again. Cover him up again, please; it'll be such a bad example for Jenny. And did Mrs. Grant come

all right by the earlier train — the one I ought to have caught? "

Rhadamanthus grunted with annoyance as the green baize cover was pulled over his cage again. It was no use to swear in the dark: one couldn't be sure that there was any audience.

"Poor dear!" said Maggie, as she unwound her things. "You shall have the garden all to yourself to-morrow, and shall swear as much as ever you like. What a comfort that it isn't a mortal sin! I quite envied him to-day when I missed that train. I *did* want to see you so much. And how are you, my dearest? "

Certainly Maggie was not suffering from depression, thought Marion, as she got her into the room which they both insisted on calling the Parlour, much to Mrs. Grant's distress, who thought it rather common.

("But, my dear!" Maggie had remonstrated. "A Parlour means a place where you talk: and I'm sure I do enough of that, in all conscience!")

She was radiant now; if that word can be applied to a middle-aged lady of Miss Brent's build and features, across whose face a wisp of black hair had fallen, whose boots were thick in London mud and whose clothes were dishevelled.

She did not, of course, wait for an answer; but gave it herself.

"You look perfectly sweet, my dear, with your face all sunburnt. If only we women were more sensible, you know — they'd give us the vote and anything else we wanted — I mean more sensible not only about our complexions but in all kinds of ways. And did you really go deer-stalking? How perfectly delicious, ex-

cept for the deer, poor thing! And salmon-fishing too! You must tell me all about it at supper. And your music! You must sing afterwards, if you don't feel too tired; and I shall have a stall all to myself like that mad king — I forget his name — who turned on real rain. Such a test of real genius, you know. And it really and truly is all fixed and settled, isn't it — in January — I think you said the fourth? And how extraordinarily enterprising of Mr. Harrison; and yet how obvious, when you come to think of it, like all real geniuses — I mean to have Wagner after Christmas — between Advent and Lent, so to speak — like a sandwich, between two slices of Palestrina — the mustard and all that."

She was moving restlessly about the room as she talked; and yet, oddly enough, it had a restful effect. She opened a window and then shut it again as the rain swept in; she stooped to warm her stout, ringed hands at the little fire Marion had caused to be made: she put back the wisp of hair from her face about four times, without the faintest sign of impatience; and at last, when Marion really was beginning to tell her about Brae House she fled upstairs with a gesture of apology, and came down ten minutes later with her shoes and dress changed and begged Marion to begin all over again.

IV

After supper they went together into the music-room, Maggie still leading the conversation with unflagging vigour.

First there was the whole history of her aunt in Somersetshire to relate over again. Maggie herself,

it seemed, had taken the place of a trained nurse for her entire holiday.

"I didn't get out much, my dearest; and that's the truth of it. You see Aunt Gwendolen wanted me to read to her all the morning, and then sit with her while she slept all the afternoon, because she didn't like waking up and finding no one there. She said it made her think of her grave. And then she wanted to be read to all the evening; and one had to go on all the time because she always woke up if one stopped: but that didn't matter to me much, because I did all my spiritual reading that way and said my rosary too. Poor dear Aunt Gwendolen! If only she'd known: she thought it was Blair's Sermons, I think; while it was Faber all the time; and I'm sure she thinks Faber is in hell. She can't bear Catholics: and she only puts up with me because she can't get any one else. Well, perhaps it all did her good unconsciously: we never know. There's a lot about the subconscious self that I read in a magazine going down there; and that's really what put it in my head. Now, my dear, you're going to sing to me, if you please; and I'm going to sit quiet. I've talked too much."

With a look of extraordinary determination Maggie sat down before the stove, with her rosary, that had appeared like a conjuring trick, in her hand; while Marion went and turned back the lid of the piano.

"What shall I sing?" she asked.

"Sing that lovely — one minute: there's a draught; and it'll be so bad for the piano." Maggie leapt up again, lifted a screen and dragged it across before a window.

"There! is that better?" she said. "And I'm ready."

Marion sounded a chord.

"Oh! my gracious! I've brought the wrong rosary. I always use the black one on Mondays in honour of the Holy Souls. Wait a minute, my dearest."

Marion smiled and continued to play softly, as Maggie fled out. Then she had an inspiration. She blew out the candles, shut the piano; and went swiftly across to the fire and sat down. She loved to catch out Maggie.

In about ten minutes Maggie reappeared, with the same rosary in one hand and Rhadamanthus' cage swinging from the other.

"I quite forgot what I went upstairs for," she explained. "But I saw Rhadamanthus looking so lonely on the landing that I thought I must just bring him down for a little company. How comfortable you look there, my dear! There you are, Rhadamanthus: and you've got to behave like a gentleman, or you'll go straight upstairs again. And I'm going to sit down too; and we'll have a good talk; and you're going to tell me all about Scotland and the Opera and everything else. And then we'll ring for Mrs. Grant and Jenny and have night-prayers in here at half-past nine, so that they can go to bed, and we can go on talking."

Again, it seems remarkable, but it is a fact that Marion really found this sort of thing restful, especially when she was rather harassed and uneasy. Maggie required really no answers at all, although she was extremely quick to interpret atmospheres; and, so long as Marion began a sentence now and again, it was never necessary to finish it. Yet Maggie also had the receptive faculty when it was required; and if Marion had

something that really must be said, Maggie was not only perfectly reasonable in consenting to listen to it, but had an exceptional faculty of saying an illuminating thing. Up to night-prayers, however, she had nothing particular she wanted to say, and it was enough that Marion, about every five minutes or so, uttered some such sentence as:

"On Monday I went out with Mr. Merival ——"

For this was a suggestion to Maggie to describe exactly what she had done on Monday too, and how Aunt Gwendolen had awakened suddenly in the midst of a passage from "Growth in Holiness," and demanded what was being read; but had fortunately fallen asleep again before a suitable prevarication could be put into words.

Night Prayers was a very solemn function, when once it got under way.

Mrs. Grant and Jenny were rung for, and entered with severely devotional faces. No word was said, but Maggie lighted the two candles on the chimney-piece, dropping her rosary into the grate as she did so, and then stooping, with a burning spill in her hand to find it again. Then she forgot the spill, scorched her hair, and dropped the rosary again with a loud exclamation of dismay. Marion emitted a single squirt of laughter.

"No: it doesn't matter at all, Mrs. Grant, thank you; we won't have the rosary to-night, as it's rather late. Marion, you bad child, don't laugh at me like that. What did I do with that Garden of the Soul? Oh! there it is; thank you, Jenny. Let's see; it's Monday evening, isn't it? That's the one about 'dispositions of mortality,' isn't it? — or something like that. Yes, here it is."

Even at Night Prayers Marion was conscious that she had lost something which she had once had. It had been a very simple and moving ceremony to her a year ago; kneeling there in her place whence she could watch the patch of coloured light through the window of the apse, and feel that He Himself was there, in His very Human Nature, to whom those words were addressed. Even now, too, the ceremony was not altogether without its charm, but it was domestic rather than supernatural. Maggie knelt very upright and grave by the little table facing the stove, with the crucifix and the two candles on the mantelshelf above, and gave obedient utterance to the most uncompromising sentiments and phrases printed in her book.

" ' Let us endeavour,' " she said, " ' as much as possible to put ourselves in the dispositions in which we desire to be found at the hour of death.' "

(This, Marion supposed, must be the original of the phrase " dispositions of mortality," to which her friend had referred just now.)

" ' I firmly believe,' " she stated, " ' all the sacred truths which the Catholic Church believeth and teacheth, because Thou hast revealed them. And by the assistance of Thy holy grace I am resolved to live and die in the communion of this Thy Church.' "

She addressed presently her Guardian Angel: and Marion, remembering a fancy of somebody's that every guardian angel bore a personal resemblance to his ward, speculated gently as to what Maggie's guardian angel must look like. It would be quite certain that his halo wouldn't fit very well; and if, to extend the fancy, his habits also resembled those of his ward, his ward would have to look after herself a good deal, in the long periods

of distraction under which the angel would be sure to labour.

. . . "'that we may watch with Christ and rest in peace,'" ended Maggie as she closed the book: and the congregation said, "Amen."

Then, suddenly, five minutes later, as Maggie, with a tilted bed-candle was pouring melted wax upon the cover of the new Bechstein, Marion's tongue was loosed.

"Maggie, sit down again for two minutes. . . . No, it doesn't matter in the least about the piano; the wax will do it good, I expect. I must just say one thing."

"But it'll leave a dreadful mark," murmured Maggie, distributing the wax with her handkerchief over a still larger area of polished wood.

"I prefer it marked," said Marion. "Maggie, I shall be quite angry if you don't listen to me."

Then she told her quite simply that she was not quite happy about her religion. It was not that she was intellectually troubled at all — (Maggie drew a sigh of relief when she heard that, for she was great on Intellectual Pride) — but simply that the sweet sting was gone from it; that it no longer interested her.

"I felt awful yesterday morning," she said, "when I served the eight o'clock mass. I said the words all right; but it was dreadfully perfunctory. And I didn't go to mass this morning at all. What do you think is the matter? Is it just what they call 'dryness'? I used to have dryness sometimes; but I used to mind it dreadfully, and I don't really mind this at all. That's the awful thing. And it's gone on for at least six months."

Then Maggie, after a pause, made a series of brilliant shots, with that kind of strange shrewdness which she always would show if she was given time. Her method was not at all sententious; she did not, that is to say, enunciate her views so much as evolve them from a weltering chaos. They gleamed out, and were gone again.

She began with comments on Marion's appearance, remarking that in spite of the sunburn there had been a look of anxiety in Marion's eyes which she had noticed at once. She made an excursus from this point on her own Aunt Gwendolen, and paralleled it by the illustration of Mrs. Grant on a famous day when the jelly wouldn't set. Then she delivered a series of little generalities on the subject of Interest in general, observing that no one could be really interested in a Cause, but only in a Person. This was a little confused in statement, but a rather profound truth did glimmer somewhere behind its surface. Then she arrived.

"It isn't desolation or dryness or anything like that at all, my dearest; and you mustn't flatter yourself into thinking so. I expect it's somebody you've met who's turned your head a little; for you're only a child as yet, you know, and know nothing whatever of the world. Or else it's all this excitement about the Opera — and that reminds me. You've never sung a single song tonight, after all. How did you come to forget it? And no wonder it's turned your head a little. You see Munich isn't the world at all — at least not as you saw it: it's just a big school all over again. But this summer you really have seen something of the world, and what with Scotland and everything. And I know how those things get into the imagination. (Rhadamanthus, if you interrupt me again, I shall put you out in the

passage!) Of course, I'm as pleased as I can be about the Opera and all your success; but you must remember that all that is very much the world indeed, and there's nothing so distracting and intoxicating. Don't you remember how we all renounced it to-night, all over again, with its pomps and vanities? You'd better just go to confession to-morrow and begin again." (She moved across to where Marion sat stiff and disconcerted, and began to caress her hair.) "But you're a good child, my dear; I know that well enough; and our Lord won't let you go too far. And you're looking tired to death, and ought to be in bed. Professor von Günther expressly told me that you were to take great care of your health, and above all to avoid colds." (She stooped and gave a great poke at the fire as she spoke.) "There! Now I've practically put it out!"

Marion jumped up. Resentment was ridiculous.

"Oh, you darling!" she said: and kissed her. "But you don't understand a bit," she added.

CHAPTER V

I

Maggie was sitting in the little church, a few weeks later, doing " her hour " as she called it, waiting for the mid-day Angelus which would close it, and secretly hoping it was not very far off the time, yet resolute on not looking at her watch, when she heard the door open, and rapid steps come up the aisle.

" I've had a letter," whispered Marion's voice in her ear. (It was another of Maggie's resolutions not to look round in church and see who was coming in.) " You must come at once. I can't wait."

Maggie rose with extraordinary promptitude. Here at any rate was a solid cause for breaking off her devotions. Did not all spiritual books allow for the demands of charity? Besides, she could finish " her hour " in the evening.

" When did it come? " she said, when they got outside. " Is the second post here already? Who is it from? "

Marion led the way, talking.

" It's from Mr. Harrison. He wants me to come up to town at the end of November after all — I mean, to live there. He . . . wants me to be well up in Isolde as well as in Elsa! "

Life had been a distracting thing, during the last fortnight, ever since the more formal rehearsals had be-

gun. At least twice a week she had seen Marion drive off in the pill-box carriage to catch the nine-five, when she did not actually accompany her in person; and did not get her back until just in time for supper. Marion seemed rather a moody person, too, those days. Sometimes she would come back radiant with excitement, sometimes very nearly in tears. Her reports, too, of her labours in town, seemed very disconcerting. It seemed a Bohemian sort of existence in the theatre. It was not that Maggie disliked Bohemianism in itself; but it must be of the egg-for-tea type, and shabby dressing; she did not at all like the caviare and cocktail kind, of which Marion occasionally spoke. Once, too, Professor von Günther himself had come down for three days, and, though Maggie liked and trusted him, she did not much like him about the house. It meant Jenny going out to the public-house to fetch a pint of beer, at unusual hours such as eleven in the morning; it meant a large flat hat being put, absent-mindedly, on the top of Rhadamanthus' cage, just when that bird had been set in the window to catch the sunlight; it meant, worst of all, that Maggie herself was excluded from the music-room practically all day, and the sounds of exceedingly dull and unmelodic phrases sounding from it, over and over again, now with Marion's voice, now without it. It had meant, even, on one awful occasion, on the second day, the sound of voices in dispute, with the German waxing louder and louder, until the door opened and the Professor stamped out, saying frightful and unintelligible things, with a vision of Marion herself in the middle of the room, tearful but furiously angry and defiant. (They were all very

polite at lunch, however; and the Professor refused his beer for once, which was a comfort.)

"You see," said Marion, "it's the acting as well. If it was the music alone it wouldn't matter so much. But there's van Roth to be considered too, Mr. Harrison says; and van Roth gets fearfully annoyed if his Elsa isn't there when he wants her. You see, he's getting on now, and wants his own way. Here's the letter."

Maggie took it and read it through. It was quite polite, and quite firm. It made the statements quoted by Marion. The writer regretted that the original idea of Miss Tenterden's staying in the country till the middle of December must be abandoned; but there it was. He wrote, it seemed, with the concurrence of Professor von Günther. He would be obliged if Miss Tenterden would kindly make arrangements to be in London by the last day of November, at the latest. He would even prefer a week sooner, if that were practicable. He was hers, "very truly, James P. Harrison."

"Oh, well, my dear! There's nothing to be done then. It must be as he says," began Maggie. "That's the week after next, isn't it?"

"Yes; but I think we'd better go up next week, even. You see, he asks for that; though he doesn't actually order it."

Maggie glanced at the girl; she seemed oddly excited, and very far from depressed, as might have been expected from this upset of her plans. Marion had been so particularly anxious to be in the country as long as possible; and it had been with that distinct object that

the piano had been sent down and that Maggie herself had deserted her maid-servants and her social guilds. Maggie wondered what the reason was for the girl's evident pleasure.

"What's that other letter?" she asked suddenly, nodding at a paper in Marion's hand, as she sat down. Marion remained standing with her back to the light.

"Oh! that's nothing. That's only from a friend of mine. It's no connection with this."

Now Maggie was very far indeed from being stupid. Her intuitions sometimes were uncannily shrewd; and her intuition at this instant, dealing with Marion's manner and the fact that she did not say who her correspondent was, amounted to an absolute certitude that this other letter had some very close connection indeed with the girl's pleasure in going back to town. But she had an accompanying intuition that she had better not say so.

"Well, my dear, I suppose there's no more to be said. But I'm very sorry. You'll lose three weeks of country air; and you know the doctor said it really was important, if you're to stand all the strain later on."

"Oh! that's all right," said Marion. "I'm as strong as a horse. You're a dear to take it so nicely. What a bother I am to you, to be sure!"

Maggie submitted to be kissed, rather thoughtfully. Then her mind switched off again.

"What about that riding we thought of? Perhaps that would do instead of your gardening down here. We could easily hire a horse again, and you could get into the Park for an hour at least every day. You liked it, in the holidays, you know."

Marion's face suddenly became pensive. Then it be-

came, as suddenly, alight. "Why, that's absolutely perfect. Of course I could ride; why not? I wonder who'd go with me, though?"

Her eyes strayed for one fractional instant to the letter she still held; but it was not so fractional but that Maggie saw it.

"Perhaps — perhaps, your friend would ride with you. Now who is it, my dear?"

Marion looked at her in consternation at her quickness. Then she suddenly burst out laughing and threw her arms round her.

"I think you're the cleverest woman in the world. You're a witch. You really are! Yes; I've no doubt my friend will ride with me if I ask him. It's Mr. Merival. Would that be all right, do you think?"

Even Maggie was taken aback. The absolute naturalness of the other, her frankness, and yet her odd secretiveness of a minute ago, formed a complication which she could not for the moment unravel. Marion had spoken quite freely to her of Mr. Merival during these past weeks, with a comrade's air, so simple and direct, that any idea of romance seemed absurd. Obviously these two had made friends; and, equally obviously, she had thought, there was nothing but friendship in the air. Besides, the only son of a peer does not, as a rule, make love to a *prima donna* — at least not to the kind of *prima donna* that Marion was making, and not the kind of love that Marion would tolerate for one instant.

Maggie took refuge in conversation, retreating under it like a rabbit through a thick undergrowth.

"My dear, why not? You've been deer-stalking with him, after all; and if he and his sister ride too, it'll be

delightful for you all. But what a bother it is, having to go up, anyhow! Well: I shall get back to my poor little servants; that's one comfort: and there's a meeting of the Guild on Saturday week, in Caxton Hall, with Mr. Blenkinsop as a speaker. I forget what it's about this moment; but I know it's very important. I had thought of going up to town for it, anyhow — but this is much more convenient. Why! there's the Angelus!"

She stopped abruptly and knelt down. After a moment Marion knelt too.

II

To tell the truth Marion was fully as puzzled with her own case as was her friend, and as innocent of any guile.

During the weeks that had passed since her return from Scotland, a process had been taking place which she would in utter sincerity have thought to mean the gradual extinction of Max from the romantic plane. She did not actually forget him: her experience of him had been too vivid and too new for that: and certainly she looked back on her adventures with him with a great deal of pleasurable sensation. But her music had come to the front again; even the interminably repeated phrases and scales and exercises had a grip on her soul, for they all shone with the glamour of her approaching *début* at Covent Garden; this had saturated and enveloped her, and, she thought, absorbed her. She had one note from Norah, saying that they would not be back in London till Christmas, and she had accepted that as a fact. Then, suddenly a letter had come from Max himself, beginning: "My dear Miss Tenterden," ending: "Yours ever sincerely, Max Merival," and

relating in between that the weather was getting so miserable that they were coming south at once, and asking whether by any chance she was to be in town. That was absolutely all. It was a note that an anxious parent on either side could have read with equanimity.

Yet it had thrown Marion into a curious state of excitement. It appeared to recall Max with extreme vividness, or, rather, to bring the memory of Max, even of such details as the tone of his voice, up from a realm of consciousness which she was not aware existed in her. It seemed now that music had not expelled, but only overlaid his image, even if it had not fructified it in some odd manner, for the Max that emerged was not quite the same Max as had been disappearing into her memory.

Her first impulse to be silent as to her letter from him had been simply instinctive and not calculated, and even that fact now disturbed her. Why in the world had she not told Maggie instantly, and explained that part of her pleasure at the prospect of going to town was that the Merivals would be there again?

Her frankness, too, had been no less instinctive; it was not in the least an attempt to blind. She had been as natural in intention as in expression. Since he was there, could not she ride with him? — and renew, perhaps, some of the delightful memories of Scotland? So she had said so, simply.

But she was puzzled with her own psychology, and when Maggie had gone back to church, suddenly virtuous, to finish "her hour," she herself went into the music-room, where there was room to move, to think things out.

Music is certainly the most imaginative of the arts, since it is emphatically the most creative. It is not an earthly element raised to the artistic plane, as are the others; it is far more a spiritual element brought down to earth. Therefore it is by far the most exciting of all, and becomes, if the artist is not careful, a kind of forcing-house for the emotions; and a forcing-house, it must be remembered, develops equally all the seeds that happen to be in the soil under treatment. Something of this kind, Marion dimly perceived, was happening to herself. She now remembered, as she went up and down the long floor of the music-room with her quick active steps, that a distinct feature in her vision of her own *début* was the presence of Max watching her from a box; that a thought, at least subconsciously present to her, in hours of exercise-drudgery, was that she was perfecting herself in order to show Max what Elsa really was like. Yet the thing had not been deliberate or designed in any way. Now that she attempted to analyse it, she found nothing more than a natural desire, as of one comrade towards another, to show that if he knew all about deer-stalking and salmon-fishing, she knew all about singing. And what harm was there in that? But, on to the top of all this situation, or rather penetrating and saturating every fibre of it, was the actual passion of music itself, revealing, and at the same time, colouring all these relationships, as level sunlight reveals and colours, let us say, the purple sides of heather-covered mountains, or the pools of a peaty salmon-river, giving every detail a significance which, honestly, left to itself, it did not possess. Some of this she dimly saw: other parts of it she did not see at all.

Well, it was puzzling work, thinking. (Didn't Mr. Tulliver say something like this?) The point was that she must arrange for the piano to precede her, and it would take at least two days from door to door.

III

Father Denny called the day before they left to take his leave in a proper and formal manner.

"I'm so sorry to hear you're going," he said. "I had hoped you would have been here for the midnight mass, Miss Tenterden. We are going to attempt the *Missa de Angelis* this year."

The music down here was a subject of extreme pleasure and amusement to Marion. Father Denny always deferred to her when she was present at a choir-practice, but it was in the manner of one *maestro* gracefully yielding to another. Marion was always ready to sing a *motet* if it was wished; it was a remnant of her resolution to sing to the Greater Glory of God.

"I am afraid that would have been impossible, anyhow," she said. "I always knew I should have to go before Christmas. You'll write and tell me how you get on, won't you, Father?"

The priest stirred his tea thoughtfully.

"Do you think we could manage Novello's *Adeste Fideles*, Miss Tenterden? Mr. Jenkinson has been practising the bass solo, he tells me. But we shall miss you sadly," he hastened to add, for fear her feelings should be hurt.

"I suppose you really can't come to hear me?" she said. "It's on the fourth of January. I could get you a seat right at the back of a box, you know."

He shook his head indulgently.

"Quite impossible, I am afraid. The Westminster Decrees are quite explicit. They leave no loophole at all. But you haven't said what you think of Mr. Jenkinson's powers."

"I think he'll do it splendidly," she said hastily. "He's got a very . . . a very full voice, hasn't he?"

"Yes: I think it's a very full voice, as you say," observed the priest. "But his duties as postmaster don't give him much opportunity for practising, particularly with this new Insurance Act, too."

Ah! how incredibly small all these things seemed to her now! A year ago she had loved them all, without any tinge of sarcasm. Every one of them had had a kind of minute sacredness of its own — a microcosm of importance — since all was to the Greater Glory. She had even had Mr. Jenkinson in to sing duets with her, and had scarcely missed one choir-practice during the whole of her holiday. And now it seemed so amazingly and even portentously insignificant. What in the world did it matter whether or no Mr. Jenkinson could sing the bass solo in the *Adeste?*

Meanwhile Maggie was discoursing, and Marion presently began to listen again.

"We're taking Rhadamanthus with us, you see. That's the second label he's had on his cage to-day. I like to get all those things ready in time, you know. The first he tore all to bits, in a passion: so I am sure he knows that he's going back to London; and he can't bear London, poor dear! He's always nervous about the cats. As a matter of fact I think the danger's on the other leg, so to speak. He pecked a strange dog's nose most dreadfully the other day, who only came into the garden, after all, from outside, to see who was

calling for Mabel so loudly. Mabel was the last maid we had, you know, Father. You remember Mabel, don't you? She had red hair, and sang *alto* — at least she thought it was *alto*, poor thing; and I never thought it would be quite kind to undeceive her. Oh! there go my poor beads again, for the second time this afternoon. No, don't trouble to pick them up, Father, please. They're quite accustomed to it now, poor things. They're from Lourdes, you know. What are you laughing at, my dearest?"

Yes, it was all very charming and simple and pleasant, but oh! she was in a passion to get up to London. There was room to breathe there; there were the great, clean rooms to sing in there; there was the Professor to call up on the telephone at any instant if there was even a scrap of phrasing that was difficult: there were intelligent people to talk to there, and polite people who ran to open a door, to hand her her wraps. By the way, she must not forget those furs that Maggie had promised her for a Christmas present. A *prima donna* without furs was very nearly a contradiction in terms. She thought silver fox would be the best. And there was a new riding-habit, too: she must see about that at once. The old blue one had never looked the same since Maggie had upset an entire pot of glue all over it, on a certain wet afternoon when they were mending picture frames together.

Ah! the world was a happy place. At least it was going to be.

IV

The flat on Campden Hill had been originally designed for an artist, and it was obvious that the

studio was a heaven-sent music-room, even though it had only a north aspect. But it looked delicious and home-like as Marion came into it, just before lunch next day, carrying her letters. There was the great white bear-skin rug before the fire; there were the lovely engravings on the walls; and there, above all, was the Bechstein, stripped of its vast case that very morning, with the other poor old piano with its face turned to the wall as if in disgrace.

She had opened one letter in the hall and read it through as she stood there, while Maggie ran upstairs to see if her velvet coat was really there, or had been forgotten, as most things were, at Standing. It was just a note from Max, saying that his people were away, but would Miss Tenterden keep an evening open to dine with them next week? An invitation would follow, if she would indicate the day.

The rest of the letters did not look interesting, and she tossed them on to the piano, retaining an illustrated paper in its wrap, as demanding less intellect. Then she tore it open: it had a purple star printed on its front page, which consisted of illustrations, and the inscription "*Marked Copy*" also in purple. She turned the pages quickly, and then she stopped.

When Maggie came down five minutes later, carrying the velvet coat on her arm as if to reassure herself by another's evidence that its reality was not a dream, she found Marion still looking at the paper.

"Look here, my dear," said the girl, without looking up, "we're getting on, aren't we? Oh! the coat is there, then. I'm so glad."

Maggie took the paper as well as she could with her burdened hands.

"But how nice!" she cried. "And it's really quite a good picture of you, for once. It's the one you had taken in Baker Street, isn't it, in the spring? And there's the cottage, too. What's it called? — Oh! I see. 'Miss Tenterden's country home.' I'm so glad you've decided to sing under your own name, you know: it always sounds so underhand, somehow, for somebody to be Miss Virginia Fortescue, or something like that, on the stage, when she's really Mrs. Tompkins with a husband and eleven children who all live together in Sydenham, or somewhere. Yes: it's quite a charming picture, my dear; and if you're so famous as all this before you've sung, what will it be like afterwards, I wonder."

"Ah! that's the question," remarked Marion. "Perhaps the kindest thing to do will be not to publish a picture at all. Or perhaps it'll be the County Lunatic Asylum, with 'The late Miss Tenterden's present residence' printed underneath." (She jumped up.) "Maggie, dear, if I fail now, I shall go perfectly raving mad. I really mean it. Tell me — do you think I shall fail?"

"Dearest, I'm perfectly certain you will not. But how can I tell? I'm going to make the Thirty Days' Prayer for you, beginning on the third of December, to make quite sure. My dearest, you're looking charming to-day. Give me a kiss."

"I must go and see about the riding-habit this afternoon," said the girl absently, as she lifted her cheek. "You said Dawson's in Bond Street was the best, didn't you?"

CHAPTER VI

I

Max was really astonished at himself, as he rode his chestnut by Norah's side, up the loop of the row that was before the Knightsbridge barracks, and pretended he was not watching the upper end for the appearance of Marion.

He had done a great many interesting and absorbing things since they had parted more than two months ago, and he had had no time to talk when she dined in Park Lane in the previous week. He had shot four more stags and seen Captain Moreton wound two, and other visitors miss them altogether; he had caught nineteen salmon, which was a record for one rod on the Droom River, in that period, and an uncountable number of trout. He had also shot a number of grouse. He had danced at two Gillies' Balls; had pursued a party of poachers, unsuccessfully, all night and lost them in the outskirting woods above Mulligan; he had eaten and drunk and slept as much as a healthy young man of his age has any right to do; and he had been really interested in all these things, up to the point of forgetting Marion entirely for hours at a time. Yet she beamed, and with a particular kind of appeal that he could not understand — with the air of a gallant young boy rather than that of a marriageable girl. It would be absurd to say that the thought of marrying her had not occurred to him. If a young

man of his type had spent as long in the company of the Empress of Russia as he had spent in Marion's there would have been moments when he would have contemplated the results of an alliance with the Imperial House itself. But he had not thought of marrying her, on the practical plane: it was not in order to propose to her that he wanted to see her again, but simply — in order to see her. And his knowledge that she was in London rehearsing for the Opera, and that he would see her in a month or two in the white dress and jewels of Elsa was a very distinct element in his impatience. Young men with red faces and a love of outdoor sport have, usually, a great deal more idealism and romance than their friends give them credit for; as well as more than they attribute to themselves; and it was his ignorance of this strain in his own character that puzzled him.

"I wonder how she's getting on?" said Norah, as they came under the plane-trees.

"Who? — Miss Tenterden?" said Max, with an air of disinterestedness.

"Who else? I suppose *prima donnas* make a frightful lot of money, don't they?"

"I haven't the slightest idea."

"Don't be superior. You want it nearly as much as I do. Not quite as much, as you haven't lost so much at bridge. I want pounds and pounds. My allowance is practically gone till Christmas. Captain Moreton played much too well."

"He couldn't shoot straight, though."

Norah began to stroke her mare's shoulder with her whip, in an absent-minded rhythm.

"I suppose they make quite twenty thousand a year, don't they?" she murmured. "And then how nice it must be to get it all without doing anything whatever except looking charming and singing very loud. Why are *prima donnas* all so very stout? I suppose they never take any exercise. What are you looking at, Max? Oh, there she is!"

It was really a charming figure that came towards them. Maggie had insisted on choosing the girl's horse, and had picked out a grey mare of picturesque appearance, with a long tail.

"You want to have people looking after you, my dear," she said, "and saying, 'Who is that charming girl on a grey mare?' They show so much further off, you know. We live in very vulgar days — nothing but advertisement everywhere. If you rode a rat-tailed cob no one would give you another thought. And then I shall say, 'That's the distinguished young *prima donna*, Miss Tenterden, and her *début* is on January the fourth, at Covent Garden Opera House. The curtain rises at seven-thirty precisely. How many seats can I book you?'"

Under the same auspices a green habit had been chosen with a very small green hat, in which was an iridescent cock's feather. It was unusual at that date, though no doubt it has been tried by others since. However, Miss Tenterden was actually the first to wear it. Fashions were in the melting-pot just then; and so long as one looked nice one could do as one pleased.

"How perfectly delicious you look!" cried Norah, with a quick look that took in every inch of her.

Marion smiled, and bowed to Max. She was as radiant as the morning, and that happened to be very radiant indeed, with a clear blue sky and an air as mellow as spring.

"I feel delicious," she said. "I've been singing exercises till half an hour ago; then I tore back and changed. I've only got till one. School begins again at two, sharp, till four. Four hours a day, at present."

"Good gracious! And I've just been saying that *prima donnas* had nothing to do, and how I envied you. What are you learning to do, now?"

"I'm learning to sing," said Marion, "and to act a little, too. But, you know, in a way it goes on all the time — one deep-breathes as one walks; one thinks about methods and phrasing and so on from morning till night."

"Come in the middle," said Norah, "where you can talk to both of us. Max, go round to the right. You must tell us every single thing you do. Shall we have a canter first, though?"

"This little mare is just dancing," said Marion. "Yes."

They pulled up about half way down the Ladies' Mile. Marion's mare was not quite so good as she looked; she blew out her red nostrils, and a distinct wheeze came from them.

"How well you ride!" said Norah.

"That's very kind of you," said Marion. "But I know I don't, you know. I only learned last year."

Norah made polite noises.

"Go on, Miss Tenterden," said Max, suddenly. "Tell us all about it. Tell us what time you get up

in the morning, and what you have for breakfast — and every single thing."

Marion smiled at him. He noticed again that sudden concentration of life in her eyes, and the tremulous laughter on her lips.

"Well ——" she began.

A great deal of what she said was far too allusive for them to understand, though she put it as simply as she could. But it is the most difficult thing in the world to convey an atmosphere that is completely alien to the hearers. They understood her more or less when she spoke of the hours in the music-room, the endless repetition of certain phrases, and all the fierce private discipline necessary to one who would excel in Grand Opera, or even be decently competent in it. But she could convey very little to them of the great echoing House, in which two rehearsals had been actually held, of the grand piano that sounded like a Jew's harp and the passionate little man who banged on it, bringing all his hands down together in a medley of discords when he was angry — which he usually was; of the great figure of Mr. Harrison, silent and aloof, yet moving here and there like a stout cat after mice, of Lohengrin's absurd appearance in a grey top-hat and a full-skirted coat gathered at the waist; of the heartbreaking interruptions and repetitions; of the sensations that descended upon her now and again in her endless lessons with von Günther, either that the music was so stale and inevitable that the audience would rise in a body and go out as soon as it began; or that it was entirely arbitrary and ugly, and that if Mr. Richard Wagner had chosen any other notes it

would have done just as well; of the mysteries of "colour" in orchestration; of the astonishing fact (which the two simply could not believe) that Metzing, who was to conduct, demanded that not a note should be sung, even by the principals, except on the beat of his bâton.

"Do you mean that?" asked Norah. "Do you mean that when you're singing away all by yourself, you mayn't go as you please; and that this fat man is beating your time for you?"

"I do, indeed," said Marion. "And every single gesture is fixed, too. It sounds dreadfully wooden, I know; but it isn't really. Personality comes out, you know, if you've got any. I didn't see that at first, and thought it awful; but it isn't really. And Metzing is simply glorious. We've had him twice, at present. He came over from Dresden, and went back by the night train. But it's only because he's Metzing, and insists on these rehearsals, that we've had any at all. Usually there might be just one, before the actual performance: and no more. But he's exceptional, and, as I said, glorious."

"Glorious? How do you mean?" asked Max.

"Well, he's so absolutely certain, for one thing. He knows exactly what he wants, and goes on till he gets it. He kept two unhappy French horns going over a phrase for forty minutes at his rehearsal of the orchestra till they did what he wanted; and everybody else had to wait. He was going to run through one or two scenes with the chorus, and they were all there. After about ten minutes he told the rest to sit down. 'You may sit down,' he said, with his absurd accent, 'till these gentlemen have it right begotten.' They

said, of course, that they'd always played it in their own way. They were rather insolent. 'You will play it in my way now,' he said. 'Why else am I come from Dresden?' After half an hour he threw down his bâton. 'Go on, gentlemen, till I bid you stay,' he said, and folded his arms and turned his back on them. Then at last he cried out loud, 'Ach! you have it! We will now proceed.' And the extraordinary thing was that nobody laughed."

"I don't think that sounds very glorious," said Norah. "I should call him an obstinate pig."

"No, you wouldn't indeed," said Marion very earnestly. "After all, he must get what he wants. He's the interpreter, and he's got to interpret. And then he really is kind if you're doing your best. I wasn't a bit frightened of him after the first few minutes, when he said he wanted to hear me. He's got kind eyes. He's fearfully fat; he's as fat as Planck was — the *Tristan* bass, you know; and Klingsor in *Parsifal*."

"I don't know," said Norah. "How frightful it all sounds!"

"It isn't frightful at all," said Marion, "when once you understand that you're nobody, and that he's everybody; that you're just a little joint of his finger; and that he waggles you about. That's the Bayreuth way, you know. It's new to England."

Max emitted a short exclamation. She turned to him.

"But you won't see all that, when you come," she said. "You'll think Lohengrin and I are really almost making it up as we go along. But it's Metzing — Metzing, from beginning to end." She paused. "Ah! but Isolde! That's why I'm working so hard now. I

knew Elsa inside out, of course, before I left Munich. I sang it in Düsseldorf, you know. That's where Mr. Harrison heard me. But I've not sung Isolde yet."

Her eyes sparkled as she spoke; but they softened in sudden friendliness as they rested on Max.

"What's *Lohengrin* all about?" asked Norah. "I know the story of *Tristan* all right."

"Oh, dear me! . . . Well, it's like this. I'm going to be tried and condemned because I'm supposed to have murdered my brother. I haven't, of course; he's been turned into a swan by Ortrud, who is going to marry the man I ought really to marry — Tetramund, or Friedrich — only I won't. Well, I've dreamt of a knight in silver armour, with a golden horn, who is going to rescue me; and I agree that the trumpets shall summon him; and that, if he doesn't come, I shall be condemned. Well, of course, he comes, the second time — just as in my dream. But he comes up the river in a boat drawn by a swan — and the swan's my brother. There's a lovely motif for him. And there's another glorious one in A flat for Lohengrin; and the best of all is the grail motif."

"What's a motive?" asked Norah.

"Oh! it's a phrase of music that means the thing it represents. Then there's a Warning motif: we come to that presently; and I've got one all to myself. It means me."

She smiled with delight.

"Do go on," said Norah. "I don't understand a bit; but it sounds nice."

"Well; there's a very short fight between Friedrich and Lohengrin; and then the First Act ends with gen-

eral rejoicings, because of course Lohengrin's going to marry me. In the Second Act Friedrich and Ortrud — oh! I forgot to say that the condition of all this is that I must never ask Lohengrin's name, but just trust him entirely; and so Ortrud and Friedrich plot to make me ask, and spoil everything. Well, they begin by making me feel uncomfortable; and by the time that the Second Act ends and we're going into the Cathedral to get married, I'm dreadfully upset by all Ortrud's hints and so on; and you can see I'm going to break my promise. In the Third Act Lohengrin and I are taken to the nuptial chamber; and there's a procession and the wedding march, and all that. Then when we're left alone I become rather hysterical — I always get furious with Elsa just there — and I ask his name and where he comes from; and everything's spoilt. But before he answers, in come the knights, with Friedrich, to kill Lohengrin. There's a frightful scene, and of course Friedrich gets killed instead. Then the dawn is just breaking: and the scene changes to out of doors again. And then Lohengrin says who he is: he's the son of Parsifal, who is lord of the castle where they keep the Holy Grail: and now that I've been a little fool and asked his name, he must go back and leave me. Then the swan-boat comes up again; and he says good-bye to me. But before he goes, Ortrud interrupts again; and Lohengrin prays, because he wants to turn the swan back again into my brother Godfrey. Then a dove comes down: and the swan is changed back into my brother, and I fall into his arms and die, just as the dove is beginning to tow Lohengrin's boat back again up the river. It's a dreadful sad ending. And how very badly I have told it."

She looked from one to the other; and her eyes were bright with tears or excitement.

"You've told it beautifully," said Max.

II

"She really did seem to feel it," said Norah, as they turned at last homewards, having said good-bye to Marion at the entrance to Kensington Gardens.

"Why, of course," said Max.

"No: but I should have thought she'd have got over the romance of it by now; after all that hammering in rehearsals."

Max said nothing.

"Well: we've ridden with Elsa in the Park," continued Norah. "Not every one's done that. Good gracious!"

"What's the matter?"

"I said we'd come out again to-morrow at the same time. Well: I can't. I quite forgot I'd promised to go with Jerry. I'll have to write and say so."

"Why need you do that?" asked Max. "I suppose I can meet her, can't I?"

Norah closed her parted lips.

"Yes: I suppose you can," she said.

It had been one more stage of initiation for Max to hear Marion tell the story of Elsa. He had seen that the very rapidity with which she spoke and the loose phraseology that she used, were assumed to hide a very deep feeling beneath. He had known that she had the mind of a child in some respects; she had shown that in her absorption in her adventures in Scotland; but he had not expected her, somehow, to show it with

regard to her art. But there was no mistaking her emotion. She had begun quietly, but her pace and her intensity had increased as she talked, until it was Elsa herself — very nearly — pouring out the story of her troubles, and all with that same sort of innocent appeal that she had shown in her song that evening, two months ago. It was as if a child had spoken, but out of a tragedy — a child that had been foolish and knew it. He wondered what her acting would be like. If she could get that kind of feeling to play upon the audience, she would certainly be a success.

Lady Merival was in one of her mildly peevish moods that day at lunch. Her husband was out; and on such occasions she was apt to talk a good deal more than when he was there. It was like the sun coming out on a cold spring morning: birds begin to awake from their winter depression, and to chirp gently and querulously. Lady Merival chirped to-day.

"You're a little late," she said, as they came into the drawing-room, "but your father's out: so I thought I'd wait for you. Have you had a nice ride?"

"Delightful," said Norah. "Marion Tenterden met us, you know; and told us all about *Lohengrin*. We mustn't forget her first night. It's on the fourth of January."

"Can she ride, too?" inquired Lady Merival plaintively, as she took her seat at the table.

"Oh! yes: quite well, too. Didn't you think so, Max?"

"First-rate," said Max, shortly.

"I wish she had offered to sing last week though," continued his mother, "when she came to dine. I par-

ticularly wanted General Mainwaring and his wife to hear her. They're both very fond of music; and I asked her for that reason. But your father told me I mustn't even have the candles lighted on the piano unless she offered to sing."

"They're fearfully strict with her, I hear," explained Norah. "She was telling us about that, too. (No. I'll have some cold pheasant.) She's not allowed to sing anywhere without special leave."

"What nonsense, my dear! As if she need ask any one's leave just to sing in a drawing-room. But it's just like all professionals — demanding to be received by everybody; and then not behaving like any one else."

Max lifted his eyes suddenly. Then he dropped them again.

Lady Merival proceeded. Her chirping was a little peevish to-day.

"Your father didn't like it at all; I could see that. He didn't say anything to me about it: but I am sure he expected it. I could see he was annoyed. And I let the conversation stop two or three times on purpose. I even said that it was a new piano which we had just had from Harrod's Stores; and that I hoped it was a good one. But she didn't even take that hint."

Max could bear it no more.

"I expect she thought you had asked her because you wanted to see her, mother. Very foolish, no doubt."

"My dear! how can you say that when you know I only asked her because you wanted me to? Your father didn't say a word about it, as I said. But I don't think she'd better come again for the present."

"My dear mother," said Max, with the awful de-

tached dignity of a young man; "you don't seem to realise that in the ordinary way — at least early next year, anyhow, if she's allowed to sing at all — you'd probably have to pay her at least a hundred pounds."

"My dear; what nonsense! Why, she's only a girl. It isn't as if she was at all well known: and after our asking her to Scotland, and everything."

Max was silent. He felt so angry that he could not quite trust himself to speak. His mother moved on in her slow stream of talk. It is surprising how malicious, in a small way, quite nice people are capable of being.

"I suppose she hires that horse she rode this morning. I wonder where she learned to ride. She was telling me in Scotland that she lived down in Bedford Park somewhere, until her father died."

Norah glanced imperceptibly at Max.

"She rode very well, anyhow. She's going to ride every day, she says. She is rehearsing or something, nearly all the time now."

"I daresay, my dear," said Lady Merival with dignity. And Marion ceased to exist.

III

Mr. Noble's famous shop in Oxford Street had a new customer that afternoon, when at three o'clock a very correctly dressed young man, rather weather-beaten about the face, with white spats, walked in and demanded a book all about Wagner.

"Yes, sir," said the other young man, on the wrong side of a counter. "A biography? I'm afraid we don't keep ——"

"No; no. About his operas."

"Yes, sir: we have a very learned work by ——"

"I don't want a learned work. I know nothing whatever about it. I want a book that'll tell me. I want one that really describes it all — and gives the motifs — aren't they? — and so on."

The other young man knit his forehead.

"Well, sir, I'm afraid you'll find it hard to get a book of that description. There are, of course, books that contain stories from Wagner; and there are books that are really musical studies."

Max sighed.

"Let's see some, will you?"

He stood turning one over, presently.

"This looks the kind of thing. Has it got *Lohengrin* in it?"

"Sure to have, sir. Allow me."

The other young man took it deferentially in his white hands, and turned to the index.

"Yes, sir: you will observe ——"

"Thanks. That'll do then. I'll take it with me."

He waited while it was being wrapped up. Then he had a burst of confidentiality.

"What about this new January season at Covent Garden?" he asked.

"Well, sir" — (the other young man hastened to remove an end of string from his mouth) —"it's an experiment, of course. But Mr. Harrison's generally right. There's a new artiste, I hear ——"

"Yes?" said Max suddenly.

"A Madame Farinese"— (Max's face fell) —"who, I understand, is to sing Isolde ——"

"Ah!"

"And there's a Miss Marion Tenterden ——"

"Oh! Yes: what about her?"

"There is your book, sir. Six shillings, if you please."

"What about Miss Tenterden?" asked Max earnestly, feeling for his sovereign-purse.

"She is what we call a dark horse, sir, I understand. She is to sing Elsa, it is reported." (The other young man's face suddenly glimmered with intelligence: but he made haste to dispose of it again.) "Nothing much is known of her, at present, outside privileged circles, sir. . . . There is your change, sir."

"I've heard she's very good," said Max, putting his change into his trousers pocket. He had never had so long a conversation before with a shop-assistant, except on strictly professional lines; and wondered how he was doing it.

"Indeed, sir. Well, let us hope she will justify expectations, sir. A first appearance is a very critical occasion, sir."

"Yes. Well. Good morning."

The other young man bent from his hips.

"Good morning, sir. And thank you. You're sure you wouldn't prefer that we should send the book, sir?"

"No, thanks. I'll take it."

The other young man, so soon as Max had gone out, turned to yet a third young man who was getting down music from a shelf.

"Sweet on Marion Tenterden," he said in an undertone.

CHAPTER VII

I

It was not until the week before Christmas that Maggie made up her mind to speak plainly to Marion.

If there was one thing, besides sin, that she hated, it was the giving of pain. She hated to throw away flowers until they were positively rank with decay: she hated to find fault with Rhadamanthus even when he swore at her publicly; she hated ever to say No to any one about anything. But she was also courageous, and when she was absolutely certain that pain-giving was a necessary duty, she applied it with a firm hand, but a bleeding heart. She had even been known to beat Rhadamanthus with the *Catholic Times* rolled up, when she had forgotten to put him back in his cage, and he bit, as his custom was, a visitor's ankle.

It appeared to her now, with relentless clarity, that she must speak to Marion about Max. It was not that she had the faintest doubt of Marion's excellent intentions, but there was such a thing, she said to herself, as a Reputation; and when it comes to a young *prima donna*, not yet established, riding at least three times a week with a young man like Mr. Merival — (whom, however, Maggie thoroughly liked: in fact she was engaged just now on a novena for his conversion to the Catholic religion) — when that same young *prima donna* is brought back from her practice by that same young man in a taxi-cab, three evenings out of

four, something is bound to give somewhere: the strain is too great.

The moment she elected was unfortunate, but she had screwed herself up to it by her "hour" in the Carmelite church, and dared not flinch. She walked straight upstairs to Marion's bedroom, on hearing she was there, and tapped. It was about six in the evening.

"Is that you, Maggie?" came a clear voice. "Wait one minute. No, five minutes. No. Go down to the music-room and wait for me there. I'm very busy indeed."

"But my dear ——"

"I mean it. You shall not come in. Besides the door's locked. I shan't be long."

So the music-room was to be the scene of the tragedy. Yet it looked inviting enough as she came in, down the two steps that led from the passage. The fire was bright on the hearth: and the great Bechstein winked with little flashes of light. The curtains were drawn — they were necessary in London, unfortunately — and the great rug glimmered with old Persian colours in the midst of that sea of stained and polished boards; and the white bear-skin looked warm and inviting. Over the mantelpiece hung a big engraving of the sharp featured eagle-face of the man called Richard Wagner. There was a German inscription in ink at the foot of the border, stating that it was a gift from Johann von Günther to his dear child and pupil, Marion Tenterden, with a further line, practically unreadable, with something about "auspices" in it.

She felt really unhappy; and the more so as her

courage seemed melting like wax. "And all my bones are out of joint," she murmured, reminiscent of the Church of England Prayer-Book. For she really did not know how to put it, without wounding Marion, who, she knew well enough, was as innocent as an angel, and as little versed in the ways of the world, in spite of her new airs. What she had to say to her was not easy: she wondered how she would express it: she began to construct little sentences. . . .

There was a rustle at the door, which she had left open. She turned and saw a vision. On the little platform of the upper step, with the shaded light shining on her stood Elsa.

It was a very childish Elsa — in fact the Elsa, obviously, of Wagner's dream. It was amazing how any one could ever doubt that again — the Elsa who dreamt romantically of knights in silver armour, who confidently appealed through the call of trumpets to bring him down from heaven, and who was therefore not disappointed: yet the same Elsa who broke all her promises on the very wedding-night itself, and distrusted the very hero in whom she had believed. She was "clad in white" now, "with sad and resigned demeanour, attempting no defence," standing there with her hands loosely clasped before her, and her head divinely and pathetically tilted, as a flower beaten by the storm. She was "clad in white," not of the penitent, but of the innocent maid, who needs no penitence, since she has not known sin. Her skirt hung straight, in heavy folds, from a high waist, and a border of daises, with pearl-petals ran round its edging, as round also the square-cut neck, and the square sleeves, beneath which the under-sleeves, of a yet more bleached white, were

fitted to her arms. Her shoes were white, and her stockings of a daring blue; and the notes were repeated in the heavy loose necklace that fell below her waist, in turquoise and moonstone. Her black hair was combed perfectly straight, without ornament. But the face was the greatest marvel of all; for while the features were Marion's, the face itself was, obviously, Elsa's. Her lips were down-turned, and pale; her eyebrows arched in infinite pathos; there were such lines of pain as a child's face shows after a fit of sobbing.

Then she sang, softly, a wailing phrase. Then came transformation: and her eyes brightened and glowed, and a smile came on her lips, and her hands rose, and there pealed out a cry of ecstatic welcome — yet always as of a child. So she stood: and Maggie rose in her seat staring.

Then Elsa was gone entirely; and Marion came down into the room.

"Well? How did I do it?" she said: and her lips trembled with laughter.

Maggie threw her arms round her.

"You . . . you darling!"

The girl shrank back.

"Don't! The paint'll come off. When I heard you at the door, I simply had to do it. I was trying my dress on — for the First Act: it came home half an hour ago. Isn't it heavenly?" She took her skirt up, and pirouetted slowly, showing it off.

"Isn't Madame a dear? Isn't it a dream? I insisted on the blue stockings; because Elsa's just the shade of a prig, you know — well; she's got the makings of a very small prig, anyhow. Do you think they'll see the point? And then of course we had to

have turquoises. But it doesn't matter if they don't: it's a lovely shade, anyhow. It's just the tone of the knights' mantles in *Parsifal*, translated into blue — you know, that veiled colour. They're just dead in tune. But of course these donkeys of a B. P. wouldn't see it anyhow. I've half a mind to have a note put in the book of the words, pointing it all out; and why they've to be in tune. Of course they must be; because, you see, Lohengrin is really a Knight of the Grail, though old van Roth doesn't look it. I don't care twopence. I'm Elsa: and I'm going to be just exactly right. And then my hair! Oh! they made such a fuss. They said Elsa was bound to be flaxen, and that she never had been anything else from the year one: and I said, 'Stuff and nonsense! A flaxen girl wouldn't have broken her promise: she'd just have adored, and been trustful and German and all that.' And, you know, Harrison actually gave in. I never dreamt he would, really. And then Madame wanted me to have a coronet or a fillet of some kind: and I said 'Stuff and nonsense!' to that, too. But they'll have a fit at Covent Garden. I don't care. Elsa wouldn't have had anything whatever on her head when she was coming up for trial. Now would she? But you just wait till my nuptial crown comes along. That's a crown all right. . . . Why don't you say something? . . . Oh! I'm so happy I don't know what to do! Kiss me, after all. And then you can go and wash it off."

II

But there was no evading the little real scene that had to come.

Maggie was dreadfully severe with herself all the

while she was waiting downstairs, for her gross cowardice in not doing as she had resolved, at the time she had fixed: and it was a very tremulous lady that began to administer counsel and reproaches, as soon as they had come back into the music-room after dinner.

She arranged it all beautifully.

She got the low chair for herself, and the tall chair, with wings for Marion. She thought that the poor child would be dreadfully confused and unhappy when she heard what really must be said to her, and that some little protection for her blushes would be a real kindness. And she waited, too, until Marion had become a little restless, and had had her coffee, and was beginning to walk up and down the room. And she waited, too, until Marion had done walking, because, after all, it would be kinder to let her have the shock sitting down. In fact she waited, from one excellent motive after another, each unimpeachable, so long that she saw with consternation that there were only ten minutes more before night prayers.

Then she gripped her courage with both hands — and it shook, in spite of that — and began:

"Marion, my dear."

"Yes?"

"I've got something to say. I . . . I don't think you'll like it."

"Not my dress!" cried the girl in consternation. "You don't say you don't ——"

"No, no, no. I think that's lovely. No — much more serious."

"My dear! It simply can't be."

Marion sank back again, smiling. With sudden res-

olution Maggie got up and came round behind the tall chair, leaning over its back.

"No: don't move," she said. "You won't like it a bit. It's . . . it's about Mr. Merival." (The girl's foot had been swinging gently; she had one knee crossed over the other; and Maggie saw how, suddenly, the movement ceased.) She went on hurriedly:

"My dear, you know I'm an old woman — a very wicked old woman too; and I do know the world — at least I know a good deal of it — more than enough. And . . . and I know what a simple darling you are, and that you don't understand a bit about all kinds of things."

Marion's head turned — the least little fraction — so that Maggie could see the curve of her cheek.

"And — and: oh! I must say it straight out. I can't beat about things; at least, if I do I always make the dust fly so terribly that no one can see what they are." (She put her hand softly on to the girl's hair. Marion made no more movement.)

"Well: this is it. My dearest, you simply mustn't go with him such a lot. You don't understand."

There followed a profound silence. Then the tick of the clock was heard very distinctly five or six times.

Maggie had begun very softly to stroke the girl's head, when suddenly a pair of hands rose swiftly from below and caught her own.

"There! I've got you," said Marion. "You censorious old body! Now you come round here and be talked to!"

"But ——"

"You come round here."

Maggie suffered herself to be led round the wing of the chair, her hand still grasped by the two of the girl. She was a little reassured, but not altogether, by the tone in the other's voice. It was natural and easy: but it was not entirely natural and easy.

"You're not angry with me —— ?" she began, peering at Marion's face in the leaping firelight.

For answer the girl slid her hands up to the other's elbow, and drew down her face.

"Kiss me instantly," she said, "or I shall be."

Maggie obeyed.

"But how nice of you to take it like that!" she said.

"Come! sit down by me. There's plenty of room for two."

Marion slid into the corner of the wide chair and drew Maggie down into it, slipping her arm round her waist.

"Now you've got to listen to me. I think it's perfectly dear of you to have spoken out what was in your mind. How you must have hated it, you poor darling! And I know exactly what you mean. Well: first of all I can reassure you. Mr. Merival has gone down with his people into the country this afternoon. To be quite accurate, they all left together by the four o'clock train from Victoria; and they won't be back till just after Christmas. Does that make you feel better?"

"Oh —— !"

"That's number one. Number two is that you don't a bit understand the — the new system of things. In your young days — as you're always saying — (you must remember you're as nearly as possible twice my

age) — well, in your young days it would have been Most Improper for me to go about alone with Mr. Merival in the sort of way I've been doing."

"My dearest, I don't think you realise ——"

"Wait. Number three. I entirely recognise your right to look after me in this sort of thing: and . . . and I love you to do it." (Her voice sank to a murmur; and she drew Maggie's cheek down to her own for an instant.) "So I'll do as you say; though I don't agree a bit. That's to say, I'll promise to ask your leave, solemnly, any time I want to go with him — though there certainly won't be much chance, anyhow. And if you say No, I won't go. Will that do? At any rate for the next six months."

Maggie was suddenly overwhelmed with a passion of affection and gratitude. She threw her other arm round the girl, and kissed her.

"My darling: you're just an angel come down from heaven. Only you mustn't go back, because I want you. And I won't be tiresome and narrow. I'm . . . I'm a silly old woman."

Somehow, after all, Maggie was not so content an hour later: and yet when she tried to analyse the reasons for her uneasiness, they appeared to dissolve into nothing at all.

Immediately after her burst of gratitude, the other had stood up and said that it was time for night prayers, but that she was so tired that she thought she'd go to bed before them. She had had five hours' singing that day, it seemed, and Isolde had proved extremely trying. She had been at the *Liebestod* — that amazing combination of love and memory and joy

and misery — and von Günther had been far from pleased, although he had been comparatively complimentary a week ago. Also he had found fault with no less than five of her phrasings in Elsa, although she had been under the impression that she knew Elsa backwards, and "in her sleep" as she said. In fact she thought she would go to bed; and would Maggie, for once, not come and say good night?

Therefore, when night prayers were over, Maggie had nothing whatever to do — (since she had performed her various devotions earlier in the day, on purpose to have an hour free for conversation) — except go over her recent action and its effects.

There were just three reasons, she considered, for uneasiness: yet each one of them was simply nothing taken by itself.

First there was Marion's minute knowledge of the departure of the Merivals by the four o'clock train. Yet, what was there in that? What could be more natural than that Max Merival should have happened to mention it, and Marion to remember it? Did not Maggie herself remember, at this very moment, that she had seen on a placard that morning that a man called P. R. Johnson either was or was not going to South Africa; and that an American on an omnibus had said in her hearing that some one — she did not know who — could "give" some one else — she did not know who —"cards and spades"? If wholly irrelevant pieces of information of this kind could stick in her own mind all day, why should it be thought significant that Marion should remember that the Merivals were leaving Victoria by the four o'clock train?

The other two causes for uneasiness — causes which

she repudiated the moment she examined them — were that neither the voice nor the face of Marion, as she had uttered her reassuring sentences, and stood up afterwards, were entirely natural and familiar.

Yet what else could she — Maggie — expect, after the blundering way in which she had introduced the subject? Obviously it could not have been very pleasant for the girl to have been accused, practically without any warning, of indiscretion, however slight, in regard to a young man. Had she not, after all, taken the rebuke admirably and submissively? And, since that was so, could she not be allowed to show just the faintest shock, in her manner, after so clumsily veiled an accusation?

No. It was plain that there was no reason for uneasiness at all. And Maggie not only called herself an old fool, but actually mentioned the matter in her final devotions in her own bedroom an hour later.

III

In the days that followed up to Christmas and even beyond it, it appeared to Maggie that really and truly the girl was a little overdone; and this was a very appalling consideration, since the strain afterwards would be incalculably greater than any strain now. Even Maggie was beginning to appreciate what that strain would be.

First there was the terrific ordeal of the *début* itself: for the appearance at Düsseldorf, though it had been the final occasion of so much, did not really count. And there were further elements, too, that made this particular *début* the more trying. There was, for example, the element of experiment in having a Wagner

season at such a time of year, there was the new departure of allowing Metzing to introduce the Bayreuth system for the first time, and to interfere, from the musician's point of view, very profoundly indeed with the traditions of Covent Garden. That he should already have come twice from Dresden was a sufficient indication that significant changes were contemplated.

Next, for Marion, there was the suspense as to whether her future should be of one kind or of another. It was a very startling exception at all that a singer of her age and almost negligible experience should be cast for the extraordinarily fatiguing part of Elsa — which part, too, she would have to sing, according to agreement, not less than five times in the proposed six weeks of the season, to say nothing of the three performances in *Tristan und Isolde* for which she had now pledged herself, should Madame Farinese be unable to appear. And there was no doubt but that, ordinarily speaking, her entire future as a singer in Grand Opera depended on the first impression she produced. She had accepted rather low terms — fifteen pounds only for each appearance — on the understanding that should the authorities engage her for Wagner opera in the summer, these should be raised to a hundred. Von Günther, indeed, was confident of her success, if her temperament and physical strength should prove adequate: but this was exactly the matter in doubt.

Thirdly, as the days went by and the girl's moodiness seemed to increase, more than once it was only by a real effort of will that Maggie was able to suppress the suspicion that Max Merival was yet one more element of disturbance. Yet Marion never mentioned him until Christmas Day. Meantime Maggie did all in her

power to soothe and quiet her friend, to watch her health, and to force her out for exercise and fresh air.

It was on Christmas Day, then, that Marion first spoke, without introduction, of Max, directly.

The two had been down together to St. Paul's Cathedral to hear the carols after the evening service. Maggie had, indeed, shrunk from going; and it was not until she had been to see her Carmelite confessor and had received from him an assurance that she could not possibly incur the sin of schism by sitting in the last row of the nave of that Protestant temple that she gave in.

"But I shall feel most uncomfortable, for all that," she had said in the taxi on the way down. "Suppose the roof were to fall in and kill us! Where should we be then?"

"I don't think it could possibly displease the Heavenly Powers," Marion had retorted, "nearly so much as my appearing on a positive stage. And yet you're going to be my accomplice the week after next — in that."

"Well; but ——"

"If the roof does fall in, and we're all killed," continued the girl, "I shall just say that I went to hear the music. You can say what you like."

"My dear: don't talk like that. It's too serious."

"Well: you can say Father James gave you leave."

Maggie eyed her, with a gleam of returning hope.

"That's exactly what I shall say," she said with resolution.

The beauty of the music and the place certainly did something, at least after a while, to soothe poor Maggie's agitation. Overhead the great dim dome

darkened and darkened, till the ring of light sprang out as by magic and crowned its brows with glory. Far away up in the choir, beyond the shaded lights, burned the two tall candles before the white reredos; on either side were the lines of white figures, luminous against the black woodwork of the stalls. And down through these pleasures of sight, like light cutting through dusty air, came the pleasures of sound — the music of those antique bitter-sweet airs, solemn as a church and yet as gay as a country-fair; that strange wedding, accomplished in carols as in nothing else, of the deepest mysteries of Supernature with the lightest emotions of humanity. They sang of the Virgin Unspotted, of the bells of the City of God, of the First Adam and of the Second, of the Nowell of the Fields of Bethlehem. Once Maggie, with eyes a little dim, turned smiling to her friend. But Marion sat with closed eyes and parted lips, as if she slept.

On the way back Maggie's scruples returned and she made haste to silence them by professions of loyalty.

"How sad it is to think of all those poor misguided people ——"

Marion turned with something almost like impatience.

"My dear: do leave them alone. At any rate they sang very beautifully. You must admit that."

"Yes: I know: and that makes it all the worse. And they're our carols, after all, which they've stolen from us."

"I don't want to spoil your argument," said Marion, "but do do Dr. Barnby the justice to remember that he certainly was not a Catholic."

Maggie closed her eyes patiently.

—"As they've stolen the very buildings in which they worship."

"That particular building, anyhow, they didn't. It was built by Sir Christopher Wren in the reign of Charles the Second. See how I remember my lessons."

"Well: anyhow, it's very sad," said Maggie, whose humour was apt to forsake her when she was in the controversial vein. "And if you'd ever been a Protestant, my dear, as I was ——"

Marion suddenly turned and clapped her hands vigorously in Maggie's face.

"Wake up, my dear: you're dreaming. This is the twentieth century and Christmas Day. And we're going home to tea: and then a large dinner. I want my dinner. At least, I shall about eight. Oh! those exercises! I must do at least an hour at the — the accursed things."

"My dear!"

"Yes: I know. And that reminds me that Mr. Merival's coming back the day after to-morrow; and wants to come and see me."

There was something in her tone that made Maggie turn sharply and look at her. But the girl's face told her nothing.

CHAPTER VIII

I

Max could not have believed that an absence from London for three weeks at Christmas could be so dreary. Usually he rebelled stoutly against the circumstances that kept the London house open and the Sussex house shut, exactly at the time when the pheasants were in their prime, and every reasonable man was shooting them. This time, he would almost have welcomed the news that Farley House had been burned to the ground by Suffragettes, and that his father's usual three weeks away from the bank in December were impossible; and that all shooting invitations were cancelled.

He was beginning, too, no longer even to attempt to hide from himself the reason for this desolation, and the less he hid it, the more the situation darkened round him. For how, to put it plainly, could he possibly announce to his parents that life without a certain young *prima donna* for whom, obviously they did not care very much, was henceforth for him unthinkable? For he really thought that such was the case with him.

What increased his fever a thousand-fold was that book he had recently bought in Mr. Noble's shop.

He had read, of course, straight through immediately, the chapters dealing with the operas of *Lohengrin* and *Tristan;* and the former with especial fervour, since he had first identified Marion with the character of Elsa; and the more he read and re-read the more utterly did the romance of the story infect his very blood and brain,

and clothe the image of Marion in his mind with a halo of exquisite glory that did not strictly belong to her. So far as the story was concerned, he knew it by heart.

On the morning after their arrival at Farley Norah, hearing the unfamiliar, though feeble, sound of music from the music-room — for the Merival family had a very large and beautiful music-room in two out of their three houses, and hardly any music at all in at least three out of their four souls — turned the handle of the door at the foot of the stairs, and went in. To her amazement her brother, with a brow furrowed with earnestness and annoyance, was sitting on the music-stool picking out strong notes with one finger. His look became suddenly guilty.

"What on earth are you doing here?" she asked, in a tone which she would have used had she found him in the plate-closet or the larder.

"Only this beastly thing," he said. "I'm . . . I'm trying to pick out some of these things called *motifs*." She stopped dead.

"In *Lohengrin?*" she asked — trying not to show astonishment.

"In the whole book," he said with an appearance of being entirely at his ease.

"What book?" she asked, coming nearer.

He held it up.

"It's all about Wagner," he said. "Norah; I wish you'd strum these things over. I wish to goodness I hadn't forgotten everything I ever knew."

She saw that comment would be cruel. She sat down sedately.

"Which do you want?" she said. "Oh! I see. It's *Lohengrin.*"

"There! That one," he said.

She played it gingerly through with one finger.

"Is that right?" he asked. "Are you sure?"

She played it again.

"Yes."

"Lord! Four flats!" he said. "And I thought there were only three. Let me do it."

He half pushed her off the stool: and himself played it solemnly through. She regarded him from above.

"Well: what's the point of it?" she asked.

"That's the . . . the . . ." (he hastily peered at the print) —"it's the Warning motif. Can't you hear it? It's when he tells her not to ask his name."

"Who tells who?" demanded Norah ungrammatically. He paid no attention.

"Listen to this," he said.

He began to play the Grail motive, in A; but was under the impression that F should be played as a natural.

"There," he said, "can't you hear how — how splendid that is? Think of it ——"

"You played three wrong notes," she said gravely. "It's F sharp, you know, in the key of A."

He looked keenly at the music.

"It's all your fault," he said. "Coming bothering!"

Norah suddenly laughed. He wheeled on her: but she was grave again.

"Sorry," she said. "Go on: play some more."

"Well this is the Lohengrin motive. Wait a second.

Let's see. Four flats. That's A, B, D and E. . . . No accidentals."

He played it. Norah leaned against the window and watched him. It was astonishing to her that he could be so transparent and so unaware of it. Really men were not clever. There was Gerald, for instance.

"That's first-rate," she said. "Is she going to sing Isolde, do you know?"

He did not even pretend to misunderstand, as one either more or less subtle might have done.

"She doesn't know herself, yet. Let's see. Where does that come?"

He turned over a few pages.

"Here we are. What's this? Oh! 'the delirious ravings of the dying Tristan.'"

He played four wrong notes, firmly.

"No, it isn't," he said. "This is the . . . the 'saddest melody ever written.'"

"I thought it must be," said Norah gravely.

Again he was not attending. He had turned the page.

"Ah! here we are. This is something like a key!"

"C natural?" questioned Norah.

"Exactly. Listen to the — the — what's this? — 'the fascinating melody changes to the following lively forms.'"

He struck G, D and E.

"'*Vivace*,'" he quoted.

Norah could restrain herself no longer.

"Oh! Max, what a donkey you are! You don't really like her as much as all that, do you?"

II

It really was a little easier after he had had a talk to Norah — easier, because at any rate he had said out aloud as much of his interior feelings as a brother ever does or can say to a sister; yet harder because Norah had been terribly plain with him. The conversation, such as it was, was held there and then in the music-room, with the Chinese wall-paper: he on the music-stool, she leaning against the window.

He had spoken chiefly of Marion's genius, paying no heed to Norah's interjection that it was scarcely possible to speak of that yet, since it still remained to be seen whether she had got any. He did not, of course, dream of saying anything definite except that he thought her really splendid; neither did she even dream of saying anything more definite than that there would be the most infernal row — (she used that reprehensible phrase) — if it ever came to the ears of the authorities. Brothers and sisters, unless their relations are peculiarly and exceptionally tender, do not talk to one another of love-affairs with any sort of explicitness. Yet these two, though not in the least tender, understood one another sufficiently. There was only one sharp passage.

"She isn't our sort a bit," said Norah. "Of course she may be a genius, and all that ——"

"Our sort! Do you mean she isn't a banker's daughter?" snapped Max.

The banker's daughter flushed.

"It's not in the least the question of anything like that," she said. "If you don't know what I mean, I'm sorry for you. It really is very odd that men are so blind."

"No more odd than that women are so spiteful," retorted Max.

Norah flushed a shade more; and moved abruptly towards the door.

"All right," she said. "Manage your own affairs then."

"Sorry," said Max. "Look here, old girl, I've never found any fault with Gerald or . . . or any of your friends," he added hastily. "Why can't you leave mine alone?"

Norah paused.

"I didn't mean to be nasty," she conceded. "I daresay she is a genius."

"Of course she is!" announced Max, sounding the common chord of C with one hand.

"Let's leave it at that."

They left it at that.

Yet within his fever grew higher; and he could no more diagnose it satisfactorily than a child can diagnose his own whooping-cough. There were the spasms — the sudden flushes of affection that seized him at unexpected moments — as he sat moodily over port-wine with his father and a couple of guests; as he waited alone in wind-swept rides for the pheasants to come over; as he yawned his way upstairs from the smoking-room after a day in the open — spasms in which desire rose like a storm to see her again, to see her radiant little face as he had seen it one day unexpectedly in Kensington Gardens, as she came along the broad walk with her hands deep in her pockets, in the silver fox furs that her friend had given her. They had recognised one another quite a long way off and had begun to smile much

too soon, so that he felt like a grinning idiot (as he expressed it to himself afterwards) by the time that he reached her.

Or he pictured her as she had been in the Row in her green habit and green hat with the cock's feather, riding by his side. (One day he went a long morning's ride all alone, simply to pretend that she was with him.) Yet when he asked himself where the attraction lay, he could not tell. Feature by feature and line by line he analysed her. Sometimes he thought that it was her eyes; and sometimes her mouth; and sometimes her voice; and sometimes that neat boyish figure, alert and trim. But he did not understand that, as a matter of fact, it was that curious indefinable thing called personality, and that the exterior details of her person were only inadequate little channels by which this approached him: he did not understand that it was an evasive kind of childish sincerity that drew him; that it was all just a simply natural thirst for a soul that really was adapted to his own.

As Christmas drew near his longing rose yet higher. He had only received one very short note from her in answer to two letters of his own; and the note told him nothing at all except that she was working steadily, and really hoped to have Isolde at her fingers' ends by the beginning of the New Year; and this sent him back in a fury of artistic zeal to his Wagner book.

But, somehow, Isolde did not fit her — at least to his imagination. Isolde was too mature, too full-blown in passion, formed on colossal lines; and Marion was, essentially, an Elsa of humanity — a little maiden, taxed beyond her strength, tried beyond bearing, yet as gallant as a blade of steel. He turned back to Elsa, and

studied her again; and, more than ever, the halo heightened and glowed about Marion's image.

He thought of her now as an Elsa in London at large, not only upon the stage, waiting for the Knight to come and free her from all that confined and held her in. She was Elsa to him as he followed her in imagination going down Kensington High Street towards Addison Road, whither the von Günthers had lately moved; Elsa as she walked with Maggie Brent in Kensington Gardens; Elsa as she sat over the fire in the music-room, and, of course, thought about him. And therefore, little by little, inevitably, he began to conceive of himself as a Lohengrin, not, indeed, with any ridiculous conceit — at least, with no more than that to which a young man in love is fully entitled — but as a strong man who steps down from a higher platform in answer to her call, rather than as one who is to raise her to his own. In a word, he became one mass of honourable romance; the limelight of his imagination — a little crude, perhaps, as limelight always is, and yet with the exciting quality which it undoubtedly possesses — played upon the stage of his thoughts; and there, in the midst of the stage was himself in silver armour with the golden horn at his belt, and beside him she in white, with the daisies on her skirt and about her throat and arms.

III

It was a joyous morning, three days before Christmas, when his father, opening his letters, suddenly announced that they must get back to town three days earlier than had been intended. He did not explain why: such was not his way.

"But there's the shooting-party on the twenty-eighth," observed Lady Merival, meekly.

"My dear," he explained, with great self-restraint, "they must just be written to. It is unavoidable. Will you kindly see to that? Unless ——" His eye strayed to his son.

"I'm afraid I can't stop, father," said Max, with immense presence of mind. "I was going to ask if I might go up earlier, anyhow. But the twenty-seventh will suit me, really."

"Very good."

The tickets for the fourth of January had, of course, been secured long ago. Lady Merival had consented to come: and even Gerald had written to say that he would make an exception for once, and be present also. They had a small box on the second tier, fairly near the middle of the house, that seated four.

"I hope poor Miss Tenterden will not be too nervous," Lady Merival had observed on the arrival of the tickets. "I hear the house is practically sold out."

"Do you mean because we are to be there?" asked Norah.

"My dear, I do not mean anything so foolish. I mean at the ordeal altogether. It must be very trying — a first performance too, with so much depending on it. But I daresay she does not feel it very keenly. People like that very often don't."

Max was extraordinarily sulky on the way up to town — at least such was the impression he made upon his family. They went up in their large Rolls-Royce, as the day was fine and frosty; and all that his family saw of him was a motionless head, planted by the chauffeur,

half enveloped in a fur collar. Norah tapped on the glass once or twice, but there was no response. The engine went wrong once, just outside Croydon, and Max sat heavy and motionless while the chauffeur climbed past his knees. They arrived just after dark, and went up to the drawing-room.

"Aren't you coming up?" demanded Norah, half-way upstairs.

"No," said Max.

As she entered the drawing-room she heard the front-door bang.

"Whatever is the matter with Max?" asked Lady Merival plaintively as she made the tea.

IV

The music-room was full of shadows, as Marion sat playing softly to herself. She had been taking it very easily these last few days, since she knew her part as perfectly as she would ever know it, and now energy and vitality were the principal necessaries. Yesterday she sat in the sun in Kensington Gardens; the day before, as has been seen, she had gone to St. Paul's and had practised only for an hour after tea. She went to bed early and slept late every morning. She was doing Swedish exercises too, and in spite of her steadily increasing anxiety as the fourth drew nearer, her physical vitality was as high as she had ever known it.

It may have been this, partly, that made her so sensitive to very clear intimations, founded, however, on details so slight as to have been negligible, under other circumstances, that in some manner the orbit of Max was coming very near her own. He had written to her twice, and once again a very short note announcing that

they were all coming up to town to-day and that he proposed to come and see her. He did not say for what purpose he was coming: he used no conventional excuses: he simply stated the fact. She had not answered this; for, honestly, she had not felt herself capable of framing sentences that would not say too much or too little. Neither had she rehearsed any particular words that she would use: she had only the substance of it perfectly clear.

The music-room at Campden Hill ran out at the back of the house into a kind of long oblong of space into which all the studios emerged, protected by the houses from the noise of the street, so that no more sound penetrated here than a murmur, rising sometimes into a boom, as a motorbus lumbered past the end, and falling again to almost complete stillness. It was impossible then to know whether any visitor were coming until the inner door of the hall shook suddenly as the outer was opened.

She had turned off all the lights, as she often did when the fire was high enough, and was extemporising softly to herself. She had done her singing for the day; and even her professional anxiety was disappearing under this increasing conviction that Max was on his way to see her. She had at first thought that the Merivals might come up in the morning, and had stayed in till about three, in case he came immediately after lunch. Then she had gone down to von Günther for an hour, and had come back to tea. Maggie was out, in the Carmelite church, probably, or perhaps making the round of her servant-maids — and Marion had gone

to the piano immediately, and had been playing ever since.

Then, suddenly, as she heard the inner door shake, she was aware that he was come. Humanly speaking it might have been any one else; in fact the simple probability was in favour of the theory that Maggie had returned. Yet she knew with absolute certitude that it was Max. Her fingers hesitated for an instant; she turned and switched on the piano lights; then again her fingers came down on the keys as the door opened, and Max appeared on the top of the two steps.

"Mr. Merival," said Jenny's voice. And the door shut; and the music ceased.

She stood up, saying nothing at all, and came round the piano as he came down into the room. The lights on the piano shed enough illumination forward into the room for her to see his face. His lips were a little open, as if he had been running, and his eyes were at once anxious and glad. He looked for a moment like some one else.

"Here you are, then," she said, putting out her hand. "I thought perhaps ——"

It came quicker than she had thought. He was in his heavy fur coat, and carried a hat in his hand. He dropped this instantly, with a swift indrawing of his breath. Then he had taken her hand in both of his, and kissed it, sinking forward on to his knees. It was eloquent and graceful, because it was so obviously spontaneous. She had not expected it: she had looked for a little formality first, and an explanation.

"My darling ——" he began, in a curious, unfamiliar voice.

Then she recovered, and drew her hand away.

"Max," she said; "please don't do that. Please . . . please sit down."

It was hopelessly commonplace, as she knew. Yet what else could she say, knowing what she had to say presently? He looked up at her a moment: then he stood.

"Yes," he said, "you're perfectly right. May I — may I take off my coat?"

As he did this she went to the bell. He was coming back towards the hearth as Jenny came in.

"Jenny," said Marion, wondering whether her voice was under command. "If Miss Brent comes, just tell her I'm engaged with some one. And I'm not at home if any one else calls."

"Yes'm," said Jenny; and retired, with a long round-eyed look at Max's back.

Max went and stood with his back to the fire. He was in a country suit she had seen him wear in Scotland. She herself sat down in the big chair with wings.

"Look here," he said abruptly. "I've got an awful lot to say. Just hear me out to the end, will you?"

She nodded.

"Well: it's obvious what I've come for, isn't it?" he smiled nervously —"and . . . and I'm not such a conceited ass as to assume anything at all. In fact — well, let me begin at the wrong end. I'm entirely dependent on my father. He gives me a good allowance, but that's all: and he could take it away with a word. Also I haven't any profession whatever. That was his own wish. I made a mull of the bank; and he told me

I'd better not try again, but . . . but just learn how to run things at home and so on. Like an ass I consented: and there it is. I'm entirely at his mercy."

He stopped a moment. Marion did not look at him. She had shaded her eyes with her hand, and her teeth gripped her lower lip.

Then his voice went on, with a tremble in it:

"Number two is that I cannot conceive his consenting to . . . to what I've come to ask you for — at least at present. It'll need a lot of time. It may be that he'll never consent. He's a deadly hard man: and I don't know him a bit. That's a fact. But I'm beginning to think that if I showed myself obstinate, and demanded a profession after all, he might put me into something. That'ud kill two birds with one stone, wouldn't it — in a way?"

He was speaking sharply and brusquely; but she loved it. It made her own part easier too, when her turn should come. But she said nothing.

"Well: that's number two. And what I propose is that I should say nothing to him at present. He's got a lot to bother him. But I think that if I went to him at the end of the season — say in July or August — and told him I was sick of doing nothing, he might put me into something, say in October. I'd tell him I'd give up Scotland and everything else. It would be worth trying, anyhow: and I do believe it would succeed. I'd insist on an independent income, of course. I mean I wouldn't just take a place from him direct. It wouldn't be much at first; but my name would be worth something, I expect. Say I was making — well — five hundred a year in a year from now? And that's putting things at their very worst — I mean that's assuming

he's still obstinate about the . . . the other thing."

His voice had taken on it something of a pleading note. She bit her lip still harder.

"Well: that's the situation. That's all I can say. . . . Er — what do you think?"

Then his self-restraint broke, as still she did not answer. At that moment she could not. But, as again he threw himself down on his knees and snatched at her hand, she recovered and sprang up.

"No, no," she cried. "Stand back a minute. I must speak first. . . . Sit down: sit down, please. Suppose — suppose any one came in! I've a lot to say, too."

It was not until he was sitting down, as sedate, to all appearances as any casual visitor, that she consented to go on.

"Now look here, Max: this is what I've got to say. And I'm going to be as businesslike as you were."

"But, good Lord ——!" began Max, starting forward.

"No: I entirely approve," said the girl. "Listen to me. Remember that up to this moment you haven't said anything at all except to tell me about your prospects — well, and . . . and . . . an impulsive expression, let us say, at the beginning, that might mean anything."

Her face was alight with merriment as he looked up at her; for her heart was dancing.

"No: I'm being quite serious," she said. "We're both going to be. You've said your say: and I'm going to say mine. This is mine. I imagine that you . . . you came to say something which you haven't yet said. Well: I don't want you to say it for . . . for eight days exactly. In eight days from now I shall sing

Elsa at Covent Garden. If you say it now, I shall say No. But in eight days I sing Elsa; and the whole of this world, and most of the next depends on what happens. Well: I won't hear a single word till that's over. It . . . it would upset me — we'll say it's that. At any rate I won't. But, if you choose to come and see me afterwards — in my dressing-room: and if I admit you, you . . . you may say what you like."

He was on his feet.

"You mean that?" he cried.

"Sit down, please. Yes, I mean precisely that. If you wish to come: and if I admit you. Those are two ifs. You may not wish to come. And even if you do, I may not let you in. It depends wholly and entirely on what happens. If I fail ——" she added slowly.

"Yes?"

"If I fail, I shall never see you again. I shall go away. I mean that, absolutely. I'm going to remain a failure. I'm not going to . . . to console myself ——"

"My darling, you don't mean ——"

Her face was set and rather hard.

"I mean it with my whole soul. If . . . if I listen to you, it'll be because I'm not ashamed."

"But ——"

A touch of humour came back to her face.

"But if I don't fail — if I'm not ashamed — I would have you remember, please — to return to business-affairs again — that a successful *prima donna* is generally tolerably well off. She'll have even more than five hundred a year. By the end of the season — or, say, at the beginning of next winter season — it should be something like five thousand."

Again he was on his feet.

"You don't think ——" he began indignantly.

"I don't think at all," she said; "I know. I know that it's time that a silly conversation should cease; and that it doesn't matter a straw from which side the money comes. Max: don't be ridiculous."

There was a pause as he sat back. She still remained standing.

"In any case," she said, "I shall understand that the affair is to be kept entirely private at least until July or August. I quite see that a profession is an excellent thing for a man, as it is for a woman too; and I entirely approve of your suggestion about Lord Merival. Therefore, by all means — if all those ifs are fulfilled — I really mean them, you know —— Oh! Max, I mustn't fail! Don't let me fail."

Her voice suddenly rose to a wail. He sprang up.

"My darling; how can you fail ——"

"No: stand back. I might fail: I dream of it, night after night. People have failed, you know. I dream of it. I dream that all the audience laugh at me, like . . . like thunder: or that they're very kind and only go out, quietly, one by one, till the theatre's empty."

Her voice had a dreadful sob in it. He was trying to take her in his arms; but she kept him off.

"Or I dream that my voice suddenly goes, and that I'm dumb — dumb: and that I try to sing, and no sound comes. And now, with this too ——"

She half turned to him with the pleading gesture of a child; and his arms were round her in a moment. She clung to him and sobbed, with her head on his shoulder. Then she raised her piteous face.

"But I mean every word," she said. "If I fail ——"

CHAPTER IX

I

Without, it was a pouring night of rain and wind; and the wet pavements shone like the surface of a black lake, streaked and patched with yellow reflections. Pedestrians scudded under umbrellas; taxicabs, with their drivers in oilskins, skated up, deposited their fares, and skated away again. The vast motorbuses went by like drunken elephants, sliding a step, and recovering, empty on top, crammed within. The crowd, gathered outside the wet and flapping awning at the entrance, was thin and discouraged, yet watched with patient admiration the white-furred women, group after group, escorted by irritated looking husbands and brothers, skip from their long cars and up the steps into the bright entrance-hall of the Opera House. The commissionaire, with the huge carriage umbrella, wearing a long military coat over his uniform, was exceptionally prompt in clearing the trampled red carpet of those who were only too anxious to get under shelter within.

Within, the huge Opera House looked larger than usual in the faintly misty atmosphere that had crept in through the passages and entrances, and the roof seemed like a firmament. The place was filling fast, though it was yet more than ten minutes before the curtain would rise, since it was known that, for the first time in London, the rule would not only be made, but kept, that the doors were to be shut, as in Bayreuth,

one clear minute before the first note of the overture. Metzing, it was said, had insisted upon this; and the knowledge that Bayreuth methods were to be followed throughout had actually increased the sensation that a Wagner season at this time of the year would have caused, anyhow. All seats had been disposed of for the first performance, a full ten days ago.

All over the house, at present, sounded an incessant low murmur of talking, the soft pad of footsteps and the noise of swinging doors. It was an extremely representative house, not merely of the kind of people who held boxes as a matter of course, but of the well-known Wagner enthusiasts; since it was rumoured that Metzing had come over three times from Dresden, and that the season was to be one of genuine artistic merit. The papers had done their duty. It was to be a new departure altogether; *Lohengrin* was to be played for the first time in England without any cuts at all. Mr. Harrison, the son of the great stockbroker, was not bothering about the financial side; he wished just to give England its chance of seeing Wagner, not merely of hearing him — of seeing him, as the composer himself had always demanded, and as Bayreuth had always provided; that the drama was to be the point, and the music, as perfect indeed as it could be, yet subsidiary, as was the new scenery, to the play. All these things had been done justice to in the papers, and, upon the programmes that lay in every seat, were printed little extracts from Wagner's own letters to the same effect.

A further feature of the extraordinary campaign was the fact that the syndicate of newspapers that had just been formed, owned and directed by Henry Blankney, had chosen to take up the movement, as it had previ-

ously taken up the desirability of vegetable oil, under various disguises, forming a part of every one's daily food, and the question of bee-culture in the suburbs; and day by day had half a column on the front pages of all its journals, contrasting English and German education to the condemnation of the former, and finding one reason, at any rate, for its inferiority, in the neglect of the opera. Every little town in Germany, it was pointed out, had some kind of an opera-house; while England boasted scarcely more than three or four, all told. Was it not obvious that such a difference must have a far-reaching effect upon the imagination, and therefore upon the whole outlook, of the two populations? Here at last, however, was a genuine attempt to repair the defect; here was a new English *prima donna*, for example, trained indeed in Germany, owing to the deplorable lack of serious musical tradition in England, yet herself wholly English, and an actress no less than a singer, according to the *maestro's* own desire. There followed, on no less than four occasions in the last fortnight a portrait of Miss Marion Tenterden, and once of Professor von Günther, who had first discovered her genius.

It was not surprising then, considering the power of repeated suggestion and the sheeplike docility of the English public that, by the time that the hidden trombones sounded the Lohengrin motive as a signal that in three minutes the doors would be shut, the house was practically full in every part; nor that as the great red curtains slid aside, showing the drop behind, a profound silence fell, and the chatter died.

By this time Marion's dressing-room was indeed a

little home of tragedy. A quarter of an hour ago the last touches had been put to her face, and the black-skirted, white-aproned dresser had gone out silently, shutting the door behind her without a sound. Mrs. Quirk had never before seen so silent a *prima donna*. Marion, after dressing, had sat down in her wrap before the huge dressing-table, with its threefold tilted mirror, and thenceforth had not spoken more than six words: she just nodded or shook her head in answer to questions. Then, when all was done, she had just said:

"Now go away, please."

When the door was shut, Marion had at first sat still, staring at that set unfamiliar face that posed as her own.

"Is this me?" she had whispered, seeing her honest wonderment reflected in the pale strange face that looked at her so unmovingly. Then she had stood up suddenly, taken a few quick turns and sat down again.

"Yes: that is really me!" she said again.

It seemed to her quite impossible a few minutes later that really that could be the orchestra that she heard. She hesitated a moment, till she perceived that not only was it the orchestra in very truth, but that the overture — that astounding microcosm of the entire drama — telling the whole story in pure sound — was at least half done. Why, Metzing could hardly have had time to get to his place. Then she remembered that it was nearly an hour ago that she had spoken to him on her way to her dressing-room. He had probably dined since she had seen him. He would have had no trouble about food! For herself, she had pretended to dine at half-past five, in the house on Campden Hill, with poor

Maggie staring at her. She had consumed, she remembered, half a plate of clear soup, two mouthfuls of roast chicken and an orange; and it had seemed to her a feat of real endurance to have got through so much.

Then, suddenly, it occurred to her that some awful mistake had been made, that it must be about nine o'clock; and that they must be playing the overture over and over again in despair, because Elsa could not be found anywhere! Was she absolutely certain that a call-boy hadn't been for her at some remote period and told her to be ready? Was she, perhaps, in the wrong dressing-room? So vivid was the appalling fear that she actually stood up; and then came a reassurance.

The dresser, it appeared, could not have quite closed the door, for something pushed softly against it, and it opened. Marion stared a moment; and then her heart leapt in amusement and relief, for in came a very small black kitten, purring and rubbing itself against the door-post. A tiny bell tinkled at its neck. The girl stooped and picked it up, remembering the famous superstition; then as she heard footsteps pass swiftly down the passage outside, she saw that a card was attached to the collar, and on it, two words were written —"For Luck"— in Max's handwriting. Why, he had bribed some one to do it, then, to cheer her up! Max! She kissed the kitten; and at the same instant a bell rang sharply by her dressing-table. That was her first signal.

II

Max found it very hard to decide on the particular form of hypocrisy that should cloak his emotions that evening, from his family. It was easy enough at din-

ner: he had talked naturally and freely, and had even given an exposition of the opera they were to hear, to Gerald, who was saying, quite untruthfully, because he thought it naïve and amusing, that music was to him nothing but a confusion of disagreeable noises.

"Well: that's all right, old chap," Max had explained, "because the story's the point. You don't go to Wagner to hear the music, any more than you go to see the people ——"

"But that's exactly what I do," said Gerald.

"Well: you've got to attend now, anyhow," remarked Max.

"And little Miss Tenterden's going to do all that?" said Gerald, when the tale had been related. "'Pon my word, I'd no idea of it. Who's Lohengrin?"

"A man called van Roth, a German."

"Why can't they get an Englishman, eh?"

"Because there isn't one fit to sing the part," Max had said unpatriotically. "It's a very extra special performance to-night, you know."

All that had been easy enough, even if a little feverish; but the fever seemed to have left him so soon as he sat down behind his mother in the little box on the second tier, and a paralysing sort of calm to have taken its place. Norah, after an attempt to make him look at the people in the house, had left him alone: and his mother had not troubled him. He was glad of that.

For he could not get out of his head the exceedingly resolute tone in which Marion had told him that she really meant what she said when she declared that if she failed she would not see him again. At first he had

thought little of it; he had thought it to be the semi-hysterical exaggeration of a very nervous girl, for it seemed to him that such a proposal marked the very height of morbidity. Yet he had not succeeded at all in reassuring himself, since, upon reflection he had come to see that at any rate it was a real point of view, however little he might sympathise with it — a real point of view quite tenable by one who took her art very seriously. Failure, in fact, to such a temperament as Marion's, would show that she was not an artist, and if not an artist, nothing. Of course he continued to argue with himself that that way of looking at things would pass, and that her failure might even cause her to turn to him with a passion that success might modify; yet, as the curtain brightened at the close of the overture, he once more was convinced that his life as well as hers hung on the next two or three hours. In any case he had his plans ready: whatever happened he was to go round, not to the stage-door, but to a little private entrance on the third tier of boxes and ask to see her. He had even taken the precaution to tip very heavily a certain attendant — the same who had promised to provide the black kitten at the right moment — and felt himself fairly certain of getting at least as far as the passage in which her dressing-room was.

At the close of the overture, while the inner curtain was actually beginning to move, Gerald turned from where he sat by Norah.

"Very pretty, old chap!" he whispered sharply. "Why! What's up ——"

Max made some violent gesture with his head, and the ladies said nothing: at least Lady Merival said nothing, and Norah made no sign.

The scenery was indeed a revelation. It was not a slavish following of Bayreuth, although in its splendour it sought to imitate Bayreuth's spirit; and in its lavishness and reality it reproduced surely what the Master would have desired — a convincing frame to a drama to which even the music must be but secondary. So, too, with the music. Metzing, who had acquired with regard to *Lohengrin* that kind of proprietary right which Richter always enjoyed with regard to the *Meistersingers*, had succeeded in getting his lesson home upon the orchestra; and as the curtain rolled up upon the scene in Brabant, upon the shining waters of the Scheldt, up which presently would move the swan-boat and the peerless knight in silver armour, and upon the company gathered there, the music had produced upon that vast audience, exactly as the Master would have wished, not a sensation that something had been performed, but was to be; not that an overture had been played, but that a story had been sketched in hint and glimpse which now was to unroll itself.

Max knew well by now at what point Elsa would appear; and as the moment drew near he actually shut his eyes. The scene seemed too brutally real, the singers too sturdily competent. It was inconceivable that she could be adequate. There was Ortrud, a great German, superb and dominant; there was Friedrich, a mighty man of sinews, and the splendid King. How could little Marion take her place among these? He shut his eyes: he even pressed his hand over them to keep them down; he longed to escape — to cry out to this great audience to be compassionate — even to go away —" their money must be returned at the doors,"

he whispered to himself. Then, he looked; and she was there.

III

As Marion came on to the stage, it seemed to her that body and soul were two things, not one, and separated entirely from any conscious point of union. She, the real Marion, was detached and aloof, considering with a kind of pity that poor walking image in white that people called Miss Tenterden, and who was now pretending to play Elsa in Richard Wagner's opera of *Lohengrin*. Ah! how unhappy Miss Tenterden was! Certainly she looked all right, though very unusual in her black hair; and how mad it had been of her to press the point! Why had she not been content with just escaping notice and being an ordinary flaxen Elsa, obedient to tradition, and lifeless? Why, too, had she ever dreamed that personality counted? Of course it did not. Tradition alone counted — tradition and correctness and a knowledge of what notes were to be sung, and what gestures were to be performed. Poor Miss Tenterden! who tried to be original! Silly little fool! Why, even now, she was wondering whether she could remember the first phrase! As for those long passages later on; why, they were gone like mist from a looking-glass. Poor Miss Tenterden!

. . . Well: she had got through so far all right. It was a curious sensation; but Marion, the soul-part, actually heard Miss Tenterden's voice three or four times: it sounded very hard and shrill; but at least it was correct. Ah! but this was no test!

Even the relation of the dream was comparatively easy; it was only the telling of a story. Wait until

Lohengrin comes! That will be the test. Meanwhile, poor Miss Tenterden must just do her best — she's not doing it actually badly, so far — must just act and sing to this stage crowd, for there is no one else there. There is only a huge dark empty space at one side, where the audience is said to be. They do not matter. Not even Max matters.

With the first call of the trumpets Marion awoke back again. But the awakening was not yet complete. Only she was aware that she was no longer wholly aloof from Miss Tenterden, and no longer actually despised or pitied her. After all, their interests were identical. They both desired Lohengrin.

And, at the second call, they were in no sense two, but one; and that one a young girl, crammed with romance, still "in white" but no longer "with sad and resigned demeanour," but expectant and urgent that the knight of her dream shall come, all in silver armour, as she has seen him, with the golden horn. Why is he so long in coming? Still the whole world waits: still the waters of the Scheldt are empty. Lohengrin! Lohengrin! Ah!

Then, he who came, motionless in feature and limb, moving on his swan-boat, shining and splendid, was to her no longer an actor — no longer van Roth, the stout German who wore a full-skirted frock-coat and muttered to himself; and no more was he just Lohengrin; but, as the music pealed under Metzing's quivering hand, till the air was eloquent as no voice ever could be, for it was a thousand voices, each a part of a mighty whole dreamed by a man to whom music was more than life — as the triumph rose to bliss, and the bliss to

ecstasy, he became to her that perfect counterpart of her being, without whom, in Richard Wagner's gospel, no soul can be complete: that heavenly other-self with whom marriage is indeed made in heaven, that perfect knight from the Mount of Salvation — in a word he became that for which her friend had grown to stand: and it was not only Elsa who cried to Lohengrin, but Marion who cried to Max.

IV

"I am very sorry, Miss Tenterden," said Mr. Harrison, suddenly barring her way, as she hurried up the passage at the end of the First Act; "but you really must go on again. We shan't be able to get on till you do. You're fearfully rushed, I know: but it's their own fault. And if they aren't out till midnight, they've only got themselves to blame."

So Marion, for the fourth time, stepped into the glare of the footlights, and bowed to the great dark space that shook and roared and sobbed. And she bowed and smiled to Max, and to Max only; and the tears ran down her face.

V

Max sat perfectly still behind his mother, as she got up at the end and began to look for her cloak. At that moment he could not have moved if the theatre had been on fire; as indeed in another sense it had been, and still smouldered.

Eight times had Marion been called before the curtain; and each time she brought some one with her. The first time it had been Lohengrin, the second time Friedrich and Ortrud, the third time Henry the

Fowler, the fourth time Gottfried and the Herald, the fifth time Four Nobles of Brabant, the sixth time Four Pages, the seventh time Lohengrin again, and the eighth time the black kitten. And at that the audience had laughed aloud in sheer delight, and the roar became a rattling murmur.

As he sat there he caught fragments of sentences through the open door, near which he was sitting, from the crowd that poured past.

—"The extraordinary childishness, so to speak——"

—"Not another voice like hers in England: and I don't believe even in ——"

—"But the acting is what beats me ——"

—"Why has nobody ever heard of her ——"

These were a few specimens that remained in his memory.

Even Gerald had been eloquent in his way. He had stared at Norah with tight lips and large eyes, and had stated that he was blowed. Norah had said nothing; nor had her mother; but Norah had looked once at Max; and he had understood.

He stood up at last with a start, remembering prudence even in that mad minute; but he could not speak. He put the cloak over his mother's shoulders.

"A really remarkable demonstration," she said. "I wish your father had been here. We must see if Miss Tenterden can't come and dine with us quite quietly one day next week: or perhaps the week after."

It took ten minutes to get out, and another five before they could find the motor. Somehow the news had spread that something remarkable had happened; and

the crowd was double the size it had been as they came in, although it was close on midnight. Even a few of the audience, in cloaks, were standing in the wet on the further side of the street, staring up at the Opera House as if for some manifestation.

Max had laid his plans well. He put the three inside, and lit a cigar; and they supposed, naturally, that he meant to sit by the chauffeur. He was determined to have no questions now; he meant to think of a good lie by to-morrow morning: he had not had time to make one yet.

"Home," he said to the chauffeur.

"You're not coming, sir?"

"No."

He saw his mother lean forward as the car started. He laughed, threw away his cigar and went back into the Opera House, up the steps, forcing his way as well as he could through the crowd that blocked the entrance.

He found the little door all right. He had taken the precaution after the second act to identify it. And his friend was waiting there.

"I can take you round to the back door of the dressing-room, sir. You can't get in at the front."

As he went along the passage, hearing the hum of voices, he caught a glimpse of a cross-passage filled with people. The attendant, when they were out of hearing, spoke behind his hand.

"They're all at her, sir," he said. "Mr. Harrison — he ——" He broke off. "That is the door, sir."

Max slipped something into his hand: and tapped. A shrewd hard face looked out.

"This isn't the way ——" began a woman's voice.

"I am Mr. Merival," he said. "I think Miss Tenterden ——"

The face relaxed into a smile.

"Yes, sir: come in, sir. Miss Tenterden left particular orders ——"

So this was the dressing-room. He looked at it vaguely.

"Miss Tenterden is out in the corridor, sir," said the white-aproned woman. "She'll be in presently. The gentlemen are all talking to her."

"Yes, yes," said Max.

He hardly noticed that the dresser had slipped out again, so fascinated was he by the dressing-room, by the mirrors, the great dressing-table, the countless boxes and cupboards. He could hear voices talking, talking.

The end came suddenly. He looked up, and she was there, still in her dress of the last act, glorious, resplendent, looking at him.

"Elsa," he said, and stretched out his hands.

PART II

CHAPTER I

I

It was a hot night in May.

There had come across the Atlantic, proclaimed by heralds, long before it arrived, one of those surprising heat waves, generated somewhere in the centre of America, and helped along, no doubt, by the Gulf Stream and other natural advantages, arriving in London just in time for Lady Merival's big evening party. It was called in the papers next morning "Lady Merival's," but if the truth were known, it was far more Lord Merival's, since it was entirely his idea that it might be useful for Lord and Lady Gerald Arbuthnot, who had just returned from their honeymoon, to meet all their friends and advertise the fact that they were now come back to London, and were finally settled in their flat in South Street.

It was really kind of the heat to arrive just in time, for, as all the world knows, one of the special features of Cheriton House is its garden — an oblong of perhaps half an acre in extent, full of innocent flowers and grass and terraces, and worth not less than about a hundred thousand pounds; and what could be more convenient and delicious than to wander out of the hot rooms and sit there, listening to the roar of London, and, perhaps, Miss Tenterden's voice coming out of the windows.

The luck was just like that of all Lord Merival's speculations. He selected a day, much too early for ordinary prudence, and behold! there was the summer

weather, exactly as if he had ordered it from Harrod's along with the ices and the really excellent champagne-cup: and there was the further luck that a Monday night had been selected, and, as all the world knew, Monday was one of the days on which Miss Tenterden did not sing at Covent Garden: there was a real hope, therefore, that she might consent to sing at Cheriton House. A little slip had actually been sent along with the At Home cards, precisely to that effect.

Miss Tenterden herself was at this moment, though Lady Merival did not know it, sitting in the garden of Cheriton House. It was quite disgraceful that such a thing should have been arranged, but it really had been adroitly done. She had arrived at a quarter to eleven in the midst of the crush, and instead of coming out again from the anteroom on the ground floor where the ladies were supposed to leave their cloaks, she had, aided and abetted by a ladies' maid, stepped simply out of the French window, with her wrap still about her head, gone down the terrace steps into the garden, turned sharply to the right where the lamps had not been lighted, and been met there by Max. Then the two had sat down together on a stone seat. About them again rose the scent of flowers.

It was not very often that these two could meet now in private, and Max had designed the entire affair.

"At eleven o'clock," he had written to her, "you shall be saying 'How do you do?' to my mother on the top of the stairs; and who will be the wiser?"

It is not often that a new singer in London Opera makes the immediate and startling sensation that Miss

Tenterden had succeeded in producing. It has been done, perhaps, three times by women in the last twenty years, and twice by men; but never before by quite the same combination of qualities as that by which Miss Tenterden rose to sudden fame. It would be absurd to compare her, in sheer quality of voice, with Tetrazzini or Melba, but then it would be equally absurd to compare these great artistes with Miss Tenterden on the purely dramatic side. Again, even if that were conceivable, there was a further element in Miss Tenterden's acting that was certainly unique, and that the extraordinary innocent charm of the personality she managed to bring to bear upon the audience. In this sense she truly re-read the character of Elsa, and somehow convinced her hearers that her reading was that which Wagner must have had in his mind: even as Isolde — a part she undertook at the beginning of May — she added an amazing pathos to tradition, for her Isolde was, in essentials, a passionate young girl, transfigured by irresistible love into a radiant maturity, rather than a mature woman who grows young again. No doubt many singers had previously attempted this presentation, but none ever succeeded as had Miss Tenterden. In a word, by her acting and her personality she realised, as even the few hostile critics allowed, exactly those proportions between the drama and the music which Wagner had persistently preached and never succeeded in gaining. However, all this is well known enough: and a full record of her success, or rather her blaze of triumph, is to be found in the files of all old newspapers of that date. Even a book was issued by Mr. Noble and ran through ten editions in a month, entitled simply "Miss Tenterden."

II

"Well?" said Max, in a low voice, under the cover of the band that blared from the lighted windows above them.

"Well?" said Marion.

"First; are you really not over-tired? You aren't finding twice a week too much? It's got to go on till the last week of July, you know."

"I'm glad it's not going to last longer," said Marion.

"It isn't the singing in itself: it's the changing every time. If only Harrison would let me do Elsa to the middle of June, and Isolde for the rest, I wouldn't mind."

"You're not ill?"

"Good gracious, no! I sleep and eat and ride like . . . like a *prima donna*."

"Now look here," said Max: "there are a hundred things I want to say. First, I really can't think it's possible for you to come to Brae House again. I know my mother will ask you: but I want you to say No."

"Exactly what I've always said. It wouldn't do a bit, my dear. As a matter of fact she has asked me; and I've said No."

"Well: you're right. I'm perfectly certain they don't suspect anything: but they mustn't. I'm going to talk to my father in August about a job; and he really must not be suspicious. Tell me; have you said anything to Miss Brent yet?"

"No. And I feel such a beast. But I simply can't."

Marion turned her troubled eyes on to him. His own had grown accustomed to the twilight of the London night as he had waited for her, and he could see that she looked a little strained. The wrap about her head

framed her clever childish face and made her look more like a boy than ever now that her hair was hidden.

"But why can't you, if you want to so much? She won't mind as much as all that, will she?"

"Max," said the girl slowly, "I haven't told you everything yet. There's something else. I haven't told you because it's got nothing to do with you, and I'm not going to let it. And it doesn't really bother me — at least not now. But it will upset Maggie dreadfully."

"My darling ——" began Max.

"And I'm not going to tell you even now. It's something to do with religion."

Max sat up.

"Oh!" he said.

"Yes, I know. I know exactly what you feel, and I quite agree. Religion, whatever else it was for, was certainly never meant to trouble and upset people: and I'm determined that it shan't, in our case, anyhow. I'm going to see a priest, and ask if there's any way out — any way that would satisfy poor Maggie; and, if there isn't — well, things will have to take their course. I'm not going to upset you, or myself either. Of course I'm miserable when I think of poor Maggie; because I owe her everything, but I can't help it. I shall do my best to make it up to her in other ways, though I'm afraid that won't be much good. You aren't angry with me, Max, for not telling you?"

He put his hand on hers as it lay on her lap. The lighted garden over the low wall that shut them out was beginning to fill with people, and he dared not be demonstrative.

"My darling, I trust you entirely. You're sure it won't upset you yourself in any way?"

"I am determined it shall not," said Marion in a low voice.

Then suddenly the music of the band in the great house overhead clashed and stopped: and then the National Anthem blared out.

"Good gracious. There's the Princess," cried Marion. "I must fly."

III

It gave Max the most deliciously romantic feelings this evening to move about among the crowds presently, apparently detached and solitary, sometimes within a yard or two of Marion, and to have a positive duty to pretend that it was no more to him than to any other of her acquaintances, whether or no she was to sing or be silent, to go or to come. He refused even to catch her eye, and probably looked at her less than any other person in the rooms. Obviously she was a success: the great beast called London had stirred its heavy head and was looking at her just now; it had even licked her feet once or twice; presently perhaps it might turn away again indifferently, or it might snarl and strike her. But at least it was regarding her now with a kind of curious admiration in its great yellow sleepy eyes.

There was first the Princess, who had insisted that the girl should be brought up to her, and was now asking that series of thoroughly intelligent questions for which Royalty is so justly famous. There was a little deferential circle round about, listening.

"You like singing in Opera, Miss Tenterden?" asked the great benign lady, in a violent Germant accent.

Miss Tenterden said she liked it very much.

"You had a great many lessons, of course? In Germany, perhaps?"

Miss Tenterden said that Munich was the town.

"Ach! Munich. Yes. You think the Germans are more musical than we English?"

Miss Tenterden said that she believed that that was the common opinion.

"Ach! well: perhaps it may be so. Beethoven, Wagner, Bach, Schumann. Yes: they are great names. You like Wagner's music, Miss Tenterden?"

Miss Tenterden said she did, very much indeed.

"I have heard you, Miss Tenterden"— (Miss Tenterden bowed slightly) —"in both your parts. In fact I have been to hear you in *Lohengrin* three times." (The Princess herself nodded slightly this time, as if to confirm the honour.) "Now tell me, which do you like best, Elsa or Isolde?"

Miss Tenterden said that she thought she preferred Elsa.

"You find her more sympathetic?"

Miss Tenterden said that she thought that was it; and her eyes roamed wildly for one instant, as if calling for help. Max hastily dropped his own. He was afraid of sudden laughter.

"But they are both such sad parts," proceeded the Princess. "I always think *Tristan und Isolde* such a sad story. And I have often wondered why Wagner could not make it end happily. And *Lohengrin* too. Why could he not have made Lohengrin stop with her?"

"But that would rather spoil the story, would it not, ma'am?" asked Marion desperately.

The Princess smiled, closing her eyes a little. Then she patted the girl's arm.

"Ach! I see you are an artist. All artists feel like that. But *I* think that artists should do what they can to make this world brighter and happier. It is sad enough," sighed the poor lady, "without going to the theatre for it. And you like London, Miss Tenterden?"

Max moved away. He knew that if he caught Marion's eye again, there would be a perfectly disgraceful scene.

The next he saw of her was as he was talking to Norah on the stairs.

Norah was very much as she had always been. Marriage did not seem to have changed her much. To be sure, it had not had much chance yet. She called to him as he went across the lobby.

"Come and breathe here," she said. "If we do live in a Moorish house, we might at least have larger windows. It's absolutely stifling."

Max detached himself from behind a pair of dowagers who were proceeding, in the manner of dowagers, very slowly, with short steps, stopping to talk in the doorways when people wanted to pass.

It was indeed stifling. Banked up on either side of the wide staircase from top to bottom were slopes of heavy-scented flowers. In the two angles of the great well of the stairway rose clusters of palms very nearly to the high painted roof. Through the three doors at the top came a roar of voices all talking together, and the impression of heat was increased by the crash of the band in the third drawing-room.

Norah happened to be alone at that moment, sitting down in a seat at an angle of the stairs. Gerald, with his hands in his pockets, was a yard or two away having conversation administered to him by a duchess — probably his aunt.

"Too typical," said Max as he sat down by his sister. ("That's right, keep the fan going.")

"How do you mean?"

"Too much like a banker's house, altogether. Too much of everything."

"Too much music?"

"Of that kind, yes."

"Is Marion going to sing, do you know?"

Max was, by now, far too well practised in deceit to make any sign.

"I haven't the slightest idea," he said. "I hope so. Then that beastly band'll have to stop."

"I wish you'd bring Marion to talk to me. I'm fixed here. Mother said that father thought this was the best place for us. And I want to talk to her again."

"My dear, won't you have the Princess while you're about it? I simply can't get near Miss Tenterden at all. . . . There, look at that."

Even as he spoke the girl drifted out of the middle doorway above them, and a little swirl of men sucked after her. One of them, a fine white-faced old man, wore a broad blue ribbon across his shirt front. He was talking to her vigorously. She looked exceedingly alive and vivid; and her eyes shone: they wandered presently down to where the brother and sister sat side by side; and she smiled between her sentences. She was wearing her Elsa jewels this evening.

"Yes: it looks perfectly hopeless," said Norah.

"But isn't it all very queer? She isn't a bit good looking, really; and I don't suppose three men out of that mob know one note of music from another. Yet look at them."

Max looked, with his head on one side.

"And she can't talk, you know, either. Marion's a dear, of course, but she isn't a bit brilliant or anything."

She lifted her fan to hide a large yawn.

"Oh! don't you think she's rather charming?" said Max cautiously.

"Of course she is. And so are you and so am I. But people don't surge through doorways after us, like sharks after a leg of mutton. Look: they're going again."

Once more Marion moved on, playing with her turquoises and moonstones. She wore no diamonds; anything less like the traditional *prima donna* could not be conceived. The wave sucked in after her again, and Max could see people in the first drawing-room beyond the great carved teak door turn to look at her.

"There! she's gone into the room where the piano is. Perhaps she's going to sing! I bet the Princess gave her a hint. Let's sit here anyhow. We can hear perfectly from here, if she does."

"I heard the Princess asking her whether she liked London and Wagner and all the other things that Princesses do ask about. Ever heard of a Bromide, Norah?"

"No: what's a Bromide?"

"The kind of thing Princesses say. In fact they say nothing else in public. It wouldn't be tactful."

"Max!"

"Yes?"

"Do you know, that in the winter I thought you were going to be foolish?"

"Surely not."

"Yes, indeed. All that riding with her, you know."

"My dear girl, you liked her yourself, in those days," said Max brilliantly.

"Well: and I like her still. I think it must be splendid to be a success like that. But it wouldn't have done, you know. Besides, she's a Catholic. Father would have had a fit."

"It's extraordinary to me," said Max reflectively, "how very religious father is, considering everything. Fifty thousand a year and religion don't seem somehow ——"

"'Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth,'" quoted Norah profanely.

"Oh! do you think father's meek?" said Max. "Dear me! That never occurred to me."

He was doing all he could to keep the talk off Marion; but Norah was interested in her at this moment. She was always interested in success.

"Well: it wouldn't have done. Besides she isn't our sort."

"You said that before," observed Max.

"Well: it's as true now as it was then. Look how ridiculous she was about bringing that old lady to my wedding — Miss Brent, wasn't it? — Don't you remember? And then the way she used to talk about her convent — Ah! there's Gerald coming back."

Max was saved an answer; and, even as Gerald came up, a sudden hush fell on the rooms overhead. Then the ripple of a piano was heard, and people ran out

of the doors of drawing-rooms number two and three, and crowded into the lobby. Miss Tenterden was about to sing.

IV

The Princess went away immediately after the song.

She came out of the third drawing-room actually with Marion beside her, and folks bowed down like corn in a wind. At the top of the stairs her Royal Highness was heard to speak.

"That was most charming, Miss Tenterden. A very great pleasure. No wonder you like singing, if you can do it as well as that. What a pleasure it must be to you."

Then the Royal smile was bestowed; and the Princess surged down the stairs, saying the proper things to Norah on her way, and smiling again on Max whom she obviously took for Gerald. Her host and hostess accompanied her all the way down; and people ran and shuffled to the top of the stairs to watch her departure.

But Marion's departure was even more impressive.

As Lady Merival was coming upstairs again, with the lightly hunted look that she usually wore on these occasions, the girl suddenly stepped out to meet her.

"I am afraid I must be going, Lady Merival," she said. "Thank you so much. A charming evening."

Then Max noticed how great the silence was. From all three doors looked faces; and they were all looking at Marion. He noticed the various expressions — disdain, admiration, wonderment, adoration — but in all of them interest. The silence was, perhaps, the greatest compliment of all.

As she began to come downstairs, again there was

a movement to see her go. From where Max stood with Norah, half way down, waiting to see her to her motor — (he thought that at least was safe) — he could see a group in the hall below, just prepared to go. But one of the men caught a sight of who was coming down; and the group stood aside to watch her progress.

She had hardly come down a step when the white-faced old man in the Garter ribbon came forward. Max could not hear what he said, as the murmur of talk and comment was beginning to break out: but he saw the girl smiling; and then he saw how the old man took her hand and kissed it.

Max himself said nothing as he met her. He waited while she said a word to Norah; and again he noticed how the parapet at the head of the stairs was now one frieze of faces. Then he went down with her silently, and waited while she went in to get her wraps.

By the time she came out again, the great blue and gold hall was full, leaving a lane for her to come out; and, with her, he walked down it, to where her little motor-brougham waited. (He had sent a man to call it up at once.)

It was an extraordinary experience. It was not easy to preserve precisely the right balance.

As they went through the crowd he spoke.

"So kind of you to sing, Miss Tenterden. You have given us all such pleasure."

Her whole face shone with mirth.

"Very kind of you to care for it, Mr. Merival."

There was no chance for a single intimate word; but as he leaned his head into the car, as if to ask for

directions to the chauffeur, he was able for one instant to lay his hand on the white-gloved fingers that rested on the edge of the window.

CHAPTER II

I

Father Franklin, S.J., was just coming upstairs from a cup of tea in the low long refectory of the Jesuit house in Mount Street, when a lay-brother met him with a card.

"I've put her in room number three, Father," he said. "She said she had an appointment."

The priest nodded, looking at the card.

"That's all right, brother," he said, and turned back through the swing doors that led to the passage where the half-dozen little parlours were ranged in a row.

Father Franklin was a great ladies' confessor, which means that he could be harder than it is possible to imagine. Tears, even, made no difference to him at all: he simply waited until they were over, and then repeated his last remark with any necessary additions that had occurred to him. He was a small man, very black about the chin, with very blue eyes, and was going rather bald on the temples. He wore, of course, the usual Jesuit's gown, rubbed shiny on the shoulders, and he walked with a limp, caused by a very bad accident in a trek-cart at the time he was stationed in Johannesburg. He was as certain — when he was certain — and as persistent and logical, and, in a sense, as compelling too, as a fugue by Bach.

The little parlours at Farm Street, approachable

through the sacristy, are familiar to many tens of thousands of people. They are small rooms, looking on the east end of the church and the garden. Each has a door with glass panels, a small table, a couple of chairs, a little carpet, a picture, a *prie-Dieu* with a chair beside it, and a violet stole lying over it, in case a man wishes to make his confession, and two or three devotional books for the entertainment and benefit of any visitor who may be kept waiting.

Father Franklin did not know Miss Tenterden at all, though he thought he knew that she was a singer in Grand Opera and a Catholic. He had been rung up on the telephone by her that morning, however, and she had asked for an appointment at five. She had not said on what business she wished to see him.

She rose as he came in, with her back to the light; and he could only make out a figure all in white, with a big white hat, and under it a small face with very steady eyes set some way apart.

"Good afternoon, Father," she said very clearly. "It is so kind of you to see me."

"Not at all. Please sit down again," said the priest.

He pulled forward the chair by the *prie-Dieu*, thereby compelling her to turn rather more towards the light. But there was not much else to remark beyond what he had already noticed.

"It's about an extremely delicate matter," she said: "and I am afraid you will think me a terribly obstinate person before I have done. However ——"

She stopped.

"Yes?" said the priest. (He liked her voice: it was very frank and clear.)

"Well: the first thing is that I'm engaged to marry a Protestant. I myself have been a Catholic always. At present the engagement is known to no one except to ourselves. There are considerable difficulties in the way of marriage. I am an opera-singer, Father. Perhaps you may have heard my name? I am singing at Covent Garden this season."

The priest bowed a little.

"I have often heard you spoken of, Miss Tenterden."

"Yes: well"— (she shifted her position a little, so that rather less light fell on her face) —"I am not a very good Catholic, I am afraid. I don't mean that I don't go to mass, because I do; and I go to the sacraments fairly often, too. I live with a friend who is very devout. Perhaps I shouldn't be as good a Catholic as I am, even, if it wasn't for that: religion doesn't mean much to me personally, I am afraid."

"I don't think that matters much," said the priest.

"How do you mean, Father?"

"Well: feelings are not always under our control. Therefore they cannot matter very much. Obedience is what matters. We can always obey."

"I know. That's just it," said Marion, moving again.

"Yes?" said the priest.

"Father: it's true, isn't it, that since this last Decree — I can't remember what it's called ——"

"You mean the *Ne temere* decree, perhaps?"

"I daresay. It's got regulations about marriage, hasn't it?"

"Yes."

"I mean about marriage in a Catholic church; and

then there are promises to be made by the Non-Catholic party, aren't there, with regard to the bringing up of the children? "

"Yes."

"And, unless these regulations are complied with, there's no dispensation possible, is there? "

"Not only that," said the priest, "but the Church does not recognise the marriage as valid."

"I thought it was that," said the girl quietly. "But I wasn't quite sure. Well, that's one point I wanted to be certain of."

"Yes? " said the priest. He began to see that there was what is called Character in this young lady.

"The main point is this," said Marion; "that I don't mean my future husband even to be asked to make those promises. There are enough difficulties without that. Of course I should like my children to be brought up Catholics, because I was; but if you knew the circumstances you would understand why I feel as I do about demanding those promises. I simply couldn't. My future husband is a very moral man — at least, I suppose he is: he's the son of a very good family, and lives the ordinary sort of life, you know. But he hasn't anything much you could call a religion; though he goes to church, I think, when he's in Scotland or in the country. His father is what is called Low Church, I believe; and is very strong against Catholics. Well, I've thought over all this very carefully, and I've quite decided — quite decided, Father — you understand — that I am not going to ask him to make these promises. I wouldn't mind, of course, asking him to be married quietly in a Catholic church, before or after the ceremony in the Protestant church

— if that made any difference. Would it, Father? "

"Not the slightest," said the priest. "No priest could perform the ceremony."

Marion glanced at him. His tone seemed a little menacing.

"Well: if that won't do — (it was the only thing I could think of) — can you tell me whether there's anything else that will do? I don't in the least want to make a scandal; and, above all, I don't want to distress the friend I live with. She's very pious, as I said; and she's been very good to me. I may say that at present she hasn't any idea I'm engaged."

The priest paused to see if she had finished. He knew the feminine way of waiting till the other began to speak, and then beginning again.

"That is all you have to say? " he said.

"Yes, Father."

He leaned back in his chair. He had been listening intently, with his hands on his knees; and he perceived that here was a case which must be dealt with quite strongly. He had detected no sign at all of hesitation in the girl's announcement of her decision.

"Well," he said. "I had better tell you straight out that there is no way at all of evading the Church's regulations."

"I don't want to evade them, Father."

"Please let me finish. . . . The regulations are clear. You have named the principal ones. The marriage must be celebrated in a Catholic church, and a Catholic church only; and the Non-Catholic party must sign a paper containing the promises. There are others as well as that which you mentioned, by the way. Unless these regulations are complied with, no dispen-

sation can be given; and the marriage is not valid."

"You mean the Church does not recognise it. Other people do."

There was a hard ring in her voice. He met it strongly.

"My child: you told me you were a Catholic, just now. Well, as a Catholic you surely know that what the Church does not recognise, God does not."

"I don't know about that," snapped Marion.

He made a little gesture with his hands.

"Then you are not a Catholic in your faith," he said. "Catholics believe that the Church has power to bind and loose; and that what she binds or looses on earth is bound or loosed in heaven. If you persist in this marriage ——"

"Wait a minute, Father, please. These are new regulations, aren't they? When my mother was married, my father wasn't a Catholic, though he became so afterwards. Well, my father only had to promise that the girls should be brought up Catholics. And I know there was a ceremony in the Protestant church, as well as in the Catholic."

"That was before this decree was promulgated in England. Since that date these other regulations have come into force."

"You mean that a marriage that was valid twenty years ago wouldn't be valid now?"

"Certainly."

"But I thought the Church didn't change!"

"She changes her disciplinary laws as she thinks fit. This is one of them."

Marion was silent.

"My child," said the priest more gently. "I only

wish you to know what you are doing. If you persist in this — this so-called marriage "— (her eyes blazed at him; but he went on steadily) —" it will be no marriage at all. This man will not be your husband in the sight of God, nor in the sight of Catholics. You will be living in sin ——"

The girl's head rose defiantly.

" Father; if you please ——"

" Listen," said the priest. " You have come to me to ask me questions about this affair. Then you must listen to the answers."

" They are brutal and false."

He smiled.

" My child, you won't hurt any one but yourself by talking like that. These are not private opinions I have formed for myself: they are statements of elementary Catholic doctrine. It is right that before you sever yourself from Christ's Church you should know what you are doing. I tell you it will not be a marriage at all; that you will be no more married to this man than to the policeman you meet as you go out into the street again. You will be unable to approach the sacraments ——"

" Can I go to the sacraments up to the time of my marriage? " she interjected sharply.

" Certainly not, if you have really formed the intention you speak of. You have already severed yourself from grace. But if it is only a temptation — and, my child, I quite see what an awful temptation it must be. You are very young, and you are no doubt very deeply in love with him. I quite understand that it is very hard; though I daresay that if you would just be a little courageous and would go to him and

tell him the truth, he would consent to everything. However, if it is only a temptation, and you will try to strive against it — then, I say to you, go to the sacraments frequently — daily, if you will — and get grace to fight. You will find that nothing is too hard, with the help of God's grace."

She had dropped her head again a little, and appeared to be meditating. The shadow of her big hat was on her face again, and he could not make out her expression. But he hoped that perhaps she was reconsidering the matter.

"Think of it, my child," he said: "Don't you think that with a little courage ——"

She stood up abruptly; and he could see that her face was set, though it smiled a little.

"Oh! no, Father: I wasn't thinking of that. I was just thinking how I could tell my friend who lives with me."

II

The little motor-brougham that waited for her outside the west door of the church was, ironically enough, a gift from Marion to Maggie — ironically, since Marion used it ten times to Maggie's once: and Maggie never used it at all without Marion. But the fiction was kept up punctiliously, and every morning at breakfast, either Marion asked Maggie whether she might have the brougham at such and such an hour, or Maggie asked Marion when she wanted it. It was a charming brougham, and had cost four hundred and fifty pounds without extras.

When Marion came out five minutes later she paused at the step.

"Covent Garden," she said.

She really was furiously angry, and with her anger was mingled a very strong strain of contempt. It seemed to her intolerable, and not only intolerable, but ridiculous that any man could talk to her in the manner of Father Franklin. Who else but a Catholic priest would dare to say such things? And, could there be anything more ridiculous than that a limping little man in a shiny gown, with a blue chin, should speak to her so, when every other man she met, so far as she could see, from Mr. Harrison downwards — Max, von Günther, the charming old gentleman with the Garter who had kissed her hand, publicly, last week, and the countless others with whom she had talked, would do their best to agree with her if she said that black was white, and if they could not quite agree would at any rate pretend to, or compromise on a dark grey. But this little man in the shiny gown had not only contradicted and snubbed her repeatedly, but had actually used expressions with regard to her marriage with Max that really were most unusual. It was all the tyranny of the priesthood, of which she had heard men speak — the absurd intolerant arrogance of persons who had had things far too much their own way, and did not know the world. Besides, who were these Catholics, after all? Surely it was too late in the day to pretend that there were no other Christians!

She cooled a little on her way to the theatre, and she began to contrast her present independence of mind with her attitude of, say, a year ago, even.

A year ago, even though then her religion was not

what it had been, she would not have dreamt of formulating such thoughts as these which now presented themselves as if ready-made. A year ago a priest's word certainly did go a very long way, at any rate when he spoke of matters in his own province; and though she might have criticised and disliked the views he put forward, she would no more have disputed his right to do so than that of a judge to pass sentence in court. Ah! but a year ago she had not known the world. Munich was not the world, and she had only just come from it. Since then a number of things had happened. Since then she had mixed with ordinary people — people who were not under the shadow of the Church, or hypnotised by her strange atmosphere: and she had found these people at least as charitable and reasonable and moral as any Catholics she had known — and far more broad-minded. There was Lord Merival for instance. She was afraid of him, and did not like him: but no one could deny his acuteness or his power. Well, Lord Merival was not only not a Catholic, but, she understood from Max, strongly opposed to Catholicism. There was the old gentleman in the Garter — Sir Robert Mainwaring, lately elevated, after his campaign in Afghanistan: there was a soldier, and a gallant one, for he wore the little brown cross for Valour as well as the Blue Ribbon for splendour. Well, Sir Robert was a Plymouth Brother, she believed, or at any rate had been. Anyhow he read a chapter from the Bible every night: Max had told her so. There was the clergyman down at Standing: a liberal, well-educated man — far better educated than poor little Father Denny, with his ridiculous choir-practices. These were all good sound people: as good as any

Catholics she knew: and not a single one of them would do anything but treat with contempt Father Franklin's absurd assertions about marriage. What did the man take her for? A fool?

She was a little flushed, but quieter again, as the motor drew up at the door of the Opera House.

The door was closed; but she sent the chauffeur up the steps to ring up the box-office: and a minute later a man ran down bareheaded and bowed to her.

"Oh! Mr. Parker," she said, "I want you to tell me how I can get a copy of that big photograph of myself that hangs in the entrance. I knew you'd be busy this evening; and I want to get one as soon as I can."

"As Elsa, madam, or as Isolde? They were taken by different firms."

"As Elsa."

"That was taken by Nauheim, madam. Cannot I save you trouble, madam, and order one for you?"

"Well; that's very kind of you," said Marion. "I wish you would. I want it sent straight to Miss Brent, at my private address."

"Yes, madam. Certainly. And you would wish it framed in the same way?"

"Please."

"Very good, madam. By the way, madam, a number of bouquets arrived only half an hour ago. Sir Robert Mainwaring has sent one; I can get you the list if you like, madam."

"No: let me have it this evening."

"Very good, madam. And they will be handed up as usual, I suppose, at the end of the Third Act."

"Please."

"And the Princess Margaret has telephoned again for the Royal Box for to-night, madam."

"Ah: it's her fourth time, isn't it?"

(She turned to bow to a man who was taking off his hat to her.)

"Yes, madam. About that."

"Ah: well. I must go and dine. Would you mind telling the chauffeur, Home?"

III

She was again a little flushed as she spun homewards through the park: but with a different emotion. It really was extremely agreeable to have a bare-headed man, notoriously haughty with his subordinates, run down the steps and take her orders with avidity; extremely agreeable to have another man whom she did not know from Adam, stop suddenly when he saw her, take off his hat, and remain with it in his hand until she drove away: agreeable again to hear that the Princess had ordered the Royal Box for the fourth time this season; and that Sir Robert Mainwaring, K.G., V.C., had sent a bouquet.

Certainly it was indeed all very different from a year ago; and once more, when she thought of the Jesuit Father, his figure seemed to have shrunk to even smaller dimensions. After all, what did the poor little man's opinions matter? They were only his opinions after all, and of a few more like him. She was of too large a mind to resent them long. Of course if he really thought all that, he was bound to say so. But how unhappy to think them. Meantime, she was to sing Elsa again to-night.

Her serenity, however, was ever so slightly disturbed as she remembered that sometime or another Maggie must be informed of the facts. That was not a pleasing prospect. These converts always took things so hardly.

Anyhow she need not tell her yet: and she could go on giving her little presents like that photograph she had just ordered for her.

As for the sacraments, she had already thought of a plan by which Maggie need not know that she was no longer going to Holy Communion. Maggie had often urged her to go to the Sunday nine o'clock mass, in spite of the fact that she herself, according to her Rule of Life, always went at eight. Well: she would take her advice at last, and go to the nine o'clock mass. Then Maggie would not know.

CHAPTER III

I

Maggie was sitting up as usual one evening in June for Marion's return from the Opera. Certainly it disorganised her Rule of Life deplorably, for it was extremely difficult to be punctual at the Carmelite church next morning at seven, if she didn't get to bed till half-past twelve or one; but she had begun by declaring that Marion should never come home and find herself lonely; and having declared so, Maggie would have died sooner than omit the ceremony. The ceremony was sometimes very short, and consisted in no more than two sentences and a kiss, followed by an immediate departure upstairs, staggering with sleep, while Marion supped alone: but it was done. On very special occasions, such as that on which no less than eight Royalties had occupied the Royal Box, and the whole place had been hung with loyal paper roses, Maggie had been compelled to remain while Marion ate and drank and talked: she even watched her smoke a single cigarette.

Plainly, therefore, Maggie, on the two evenings a week on which Marion sang, had a great deal of time on her hands. She did some extra spiritual reading, and recited the whole of her rosary all over again for her friend's success: but one cannot spiritually read forever. Therefore she had time to think, interrupted only by Rhadamanthus muttering oaths in his sleep, and ruffling his feathers with a rattle.

She was beginning to be faintly uneasy, and, fatally

enough, thought she knew why. The reason for her uneasiness she maintained was that Marion's manner had developed secretiveness. Yet she did not honestly suspect that Marion had anything whatever to be secretive about; it was the manner, not the matter, that troubled her. What secrets could such a child have?

This particular evening, between snatches of sleep, she had been rehearsing, for her own comfort, the extraordinary number of things in which Marion had been especially nice to her.

First there had been the affair of the motor, six weeks ago. Marion had not breathed a word of it, until suddenly one morning after breakfast, she had said that she had bought a little present. Maggie had inquired what this might be; and had been bidden to go and look in the street; and there was the shining gift, with a man in livery, electric lights inside, a pocket with innumerable road maps, a wolf-skin rug, and a bunch of real lilies of the valley in a little crystal tube set in silver. Maggie had not yet nearly got over the shock.

Then there had been the photograph. Maggie had mentioned one evening, when she had gone to fetch Marion from Covent Garden, and had waited a long time in the entrance-hall, that she particularly liked that particular photograph which, nearly life-size, hung at the foot of the stairs. Nothing had happened at all for a week; and then Marion, who said she had been to Farm Street, added that a replica of the photograph would arrive in a day or two.

But those were only outward signs of inward grace. That which really appealed to Maggie far more was Marion's delightful reasonableness about Mr. Merival.

It was true that he had dined with them once or twice on off-nights; but they had both been exceedingly friendly, and had not even hinted that they wished to have a private talk. Really Mr. Merival was charming, thought Maggie — so frank and open in everything. But, above all, what delighted the poor lady was that Marion hardly ever asked leave to ride with him; and once, on the occasion of an evening party at Cheriton House in May, had come back and confessed frankly that she had sat with Mr. Merival for a few minutes in the garden, but that she thought that oughtn't to count, as it was in his mother's house.

Then how, Maggie demanded of herself at the end of all those reflections, for the fiftieth time, could she dare to suspect her friend of even a shadow of secretiveness?

She awoke with a start, ten minutes later, and there was Marion laughing at her.

"My dearest darling," said the girl, coming forward, still in her light silk and swansdown hood. "You look an absolute angel when you're asleep."

Rhadamanthus chuckled ironically under his green baize cover.

"Have you come back already?" demanded Maggie feebly.

"No: not yet," said Marion with complete gravity. "I'm still in my dressing-room at Covent Garden taking off my things. I shall arrive in about twenty minutes, so you'd better be waking up. Cucumber sandwiches! How delicious and how unwholesome!"

She sat down at the little round table drawn up on

the bearskin in front of the great hearth with the portrait of Richard Wagner over it.

"Everything well?" asked Maggie, rubbing her eyes.

"Everything supreme. But Kurvenal is really too fat. He went up and down like a bellows after he was supposed to be dead. *I* saw him."

Maggie was awake at last.

"Kurvenal!" she said. "I remember him perfectly at Bayreuth, too. He was a fat man there, too. Perhaps it's the same. He had a very short tunic on, too, which made him look all the fatter. My dearest, you're eating too many of those sandwiches. And did you sing well?"

"I sang exquisitely," said Marion. "An old gentleman in front sobbed like a . . . like a . . . like an old gentleman at the *Liebestod*. Old gentlemen always like me: I'm sure I can't think why. A German old gentleman knelt right down in the street the other night, and kissed the edge of my cloak as I got into the motor."

"My dear! How dreadful for you!"

"Not at all. I liked it. I nearly kissed the top of his head in return: only it was too bald. . . . Maggie, I've got an idea. I've been thinking about it all to-day, and made up my mind just before I died. The poisoned cup was still in my hand. What about those maid-servants of yours?"

"Well, my dear; what about them? They're very good little souls. I wish I was as sure of heaven as they are. Why, there was one the other day ——"

"Yes: all right. But what I want to know is this. Haven't you got some sort of Home for them when

they're out of work? You said something about it the other day. Only you're always so secretive, you know."

Maggie jumped.

"Secretive — why, there never was any one who talked more than I do!"

"I know. That's the cleverest sort. You don't really say what you think, you know. You just escape under a torrent of words: you go creeping along underneath. Well, that's not the point. I suppose the Home is hard up, isn't it? Catholic charities always are, it seems to me. And the moment you give them anything, they just go and build another wing, or take in seventy-five more orphans, and are worse off than ever; and then you have to give them some more. Well, look here, will a hundred pounds a year — so long as I'm in proper work myself — be of any use?"

Maggie sprang up.

"My darling; you're mad. You've . . . you've eaten too many sandwiches. I couldn't dream ——"

"Just as you like," said Marion serenely. "The fact is I've come to the conclusion that I'm avaricious: and I don't see why I shouldn't save my soul as much as you."

"But my dearest, there's not the slightest need. The Lord will provide, you know; that's our motto, in Latin: only I forget at this moment ——"

"That seems to me exactly what He's doing. At least I hope so."

"My dear!"

"Well: there's the hundred pounds. We can argue it out to-morrow if you like. Of course if you don't want it, you needn't have it. It shall go somewhere

else. Perhaps to the Society for converting Irish Roman Catholics. I'm sure they need it terribly badly. Just as you like. Only, if you take it, remember it's a gift to you — to you, you understand, you darling; not to those nasty little servant-maids."

Rhadamanthus chuckled again. Then he rattled his feathers and spoke.

"Come now!" said Rhadamanthus sarcastically.

II

"My darling," said Max. "Of course you've got a perfect right to do exactly as you like. But, you know you did ask my opinion; didn't you?"

"I did," said Marion. "But never again. And I'm going to do it just the same."

A stroke of really amazing luck had fallen upon the two lovers. Sir Robert Mainwaring and his wife had been bidden to Farley for a week-end; and Sir Robert, in accepting, had actually asked whether by any chance Miss Tenterden was to be there. Obviously the only thing for Lady Merival to do was to say she had been asked, but hadn't yet replied, and, simultaneously to write to Miss Tenterden with that very invitation. It was the only thing to do, because Lord Merival had told her so. So here was Marion; and in no conceivable way could Max be suspected of any responsibility or connivance.

The argument as to Marion's new schemes of charity was being conducted in the Farley woods on the Sunday afternoon. These schemes were very considerable indeed. At present she was drawing from Covent Gar-

den just three hundred pounds a week: and as the season was twelve weeks, it is obvious that her income for that period was between three and four thousand pounds. There was also an autumn season to be considered; but, for the present she was leaving that out of her calculations.

Her proposal was to devote one thousand pounds to various charities, of which Maggie's servant-maids' Home was to be the first; and it was against the whole idea that Max had set his face.

"You've got to remember," he said, "that *prima donnas* have to make hay while the sun shines — in other words, to lay up something, particularly if they haven't much money already."

"I've got close on five thousand pounds from my father," she said.

"Well: but you must look too at the other expenses. You're living considerably above your ordinary income, as it is, aren't you? There's the chauffeur you've got: there's the purchase of the car, in fact."

"That's Maggie's. That doesn't count," said Marion hastily.

"Well, you bought it. There's five hundred gone slick."

"But I'm going to sing for years and years," explained the girl. "Look at Melba. Look at Albani."

"Oh! well," said Max. "That's what I think, anyhow."

They walked on in silence.

The woods were in superb condition. Sixty feet overhead rustled the great beech-canopies, through which the burning June sky showed in patches and

glimpses; and the air between was a gulf of mellow light, dusty with insects and motes, and busy with the sound of a myriad wings. Wood-pigeons answered one another; or, rather, conducted melancholy and liquid soliloquies, as if brooding on the happy hot peace of the Sunday afternoon. The bracken stood green and straight on either side of the long soft rides of grass and dead leaves that cut and intersected one another in every direction as far as the eye could reach.

Then Max suddenly broke the silence with the words recorded at the beginning of the chapter; and Marion answered, just as they came up to the wooden seat that faced down towards the house and gardens.

"Let's sit down," said Max.

III

The worst of it was that Marion could not tell Max, even if she had been capable of putting it into words or even into a coherent arrangement to herself, of the odd mixed motives that were impelling her to this lavish kind of charity.

First there was her perfectly natural desire to share this sudden torrent of good things with other people. There are two types of character in people who unexpectedly receive a large access of fortune: there is that which immediately begins to hand money about in all directions; and there is that which first gathers its wealth together, and secures it firmly, and then considers what should be done: sometimes this kind never gets beyond consideration. Marion, like most of those who possess the dramatic or artistic temperament, emphatically was of the first class The first class is certainly the more attractive; and the second, if it is

honest, the more effective. It was a merely spontaneous instinct, without any calculation at all, that had impelled her to give the motor-brougham to Maggie.

But a new instinct had developed in Marion since her agitating interview at Farm Street. It is a very great crisis when a person determines to break with the society in which he has been educated; and perhaps the most critical form of it is when that society is a spiritual one. Above all is it critical when that spiritual society happens to be the Catholic Church; for no religion has greater power in penetrating and saturating the minds of its adherents. The seceder therefore has every impulse to reduce the shock as much as possible, and to make the fracture superficial and not profound.

Now Marion knew perfectly well that what she intended to do meant at any rate a temporary and external breach with Catholicism. At present she would not allow that it was more than temporary or external. She did not propose formally to join any other body: she intended, at present at least, to continue to hear mass on Sundays and to call herself a Catholic; and she nurtured, of course, a desperate kind of hope that after a while she could talk to Max, and get his consent to the stipulations of which Father Franklin had spoken so plainly; and that somehow the thing could be patched up. Meanwhile, however, it was but natural that she should feel that the breach with her past had a considerable reality about it, and that she should strive to modify this reality as far as she could. The scheme that had come into her mind, therefore, was that she should give large sums away in charity — and particularly to Catholic charities, and thus make

terms, of a sort, with her own conscience, or, let us say, with her old associations. It is a very old story. Many centuries before Christianity came into the world, a king threw a gold ring into the sea, lest the gods should be jealous of his fortune.

Other schemes, too, were slowly maturing in her mind: and of one of them she presently spoke, as she heard the far-off church bells ringing for a children's service.

"That's enough about that," she said. "You must let me have my way at any rate this year. There's something else."

Max lit a cigarette. He was just a little sore. He had not forgotten that Marion herself had proposed that if the worst came to the worst, her income would be a very considerable help to them both. Obviously he could not speak of this; but he wondered that Marion did not.

"Well?" he asked.

"Do you ever go to church in the evening?"

"Good gracious, no! Why? Once is enough, isn't it? Mother goes pretty often. My father likes her to, in the country."

"You aren't a bit religious, are you, Max?"

"Why: not particularly: at least not in that way. That's not the important part of religion, anyhow. As long as one keeps straight — at least fairly straight — that's the chief thing, isn't it? It seems to me it's just as religious to sit out here and talk as to sit in a stuffy church ——"

Marion suddenly burst into a delicious spout of laughter, and put her hand on his knee.

"My dearest! Who's making Bromides now? That's what every person who doesn't want to go to church always says. Oh! don't look so offended! Now, don't they?"

"I don't see why you should suddenly attack me ——"

"Oh!" cried Marion. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry. There: I've apologised. But it is dreadfully funny, you know. It's all so entirely convenient — now, isn't it? But that's not the point. I want to go to church this evening."

"Well, of course you can have the motor again if you want; but ——"

"No: no: I don't mean my church, but yours. I want to go and see what it's like."

"But I thought you weren't allowed ——"

"Oh! we aren't, strictly. But people do go sometimes, you know, to hear the music. And I don't see why I shouldn't go — let's say, to hear the music, too."

"But, my dear, it's too frightful. Twelve ghastly little boys ——"

"That doesn't matter. I feel Sundayish. I want to . . . to sit in the village church, as that man says, and hear the parson pray and preach."

"Oh, well!"

"Will you come with me? If you won't, I daresay Sir Robert will."

"Of course I'll come. But you won't want that sort of thing too often, will you?"

He spoke in genuine alarm. She made haste to reassure him.

IV

She found herself in the garden that night, after dinner, alone with Sir Robert Mainwaring. From end to end of the great house stretched a long terrace beyond the lawn, with the ground falling swiftly away in meadowland on the further side, down to the village where she had attended Evening Prayer a couple of hours before. (Quite a considerable party had decided to go, on hearing Miss Tenterden ask at tea what time church was; and the Rector had been agreeably surprised, if a little agitated, on seeing from his reading-desk the Hall pew entirely filled with worshippers.) Overhead the moon was up — (it was the moonlight that had drawn the party out of doors) — and the country lay pale and smiling, in fold after fold, away to where the dark masses of Ashdown Forest lay grey and shadowed on the slopes opposite. The beds below the terrace were thick with growth and scents; and the moths were hovering like ghosts above the luminous flowers of the tobacco-plants that leaned against the low wall. The party had broken up into groups: Lady Merival was walking in the light from the drawing-room windows with the Rector's wife and a couple of girls. Max was with Lady Mainwaring under the cedars; in gusts, came the voices of the Rector and Lord Merival discussing high matters of village politics, and the desirability of a working-men's club-room; two or three men were smoking together in the corner by the bee-hives.

Again, Marion's reasons for having suddenly gone to church were as incoherent as those for her charitable

schemes, and came from the same direction. When one is on thin ice that is beginning to crack, one desires to distribute one's weight as widely as possible. She had an idea that her rôle in future was to be that of general goodness and broad-mindedness. She was moving, as most people do (except the disillusioned), by a series of poses, adapted to her shifting situation. To give large sums away in charity, and to attend the worship of denominations other than her own, seemed to be parts of her present attitude: she was severing herself from the Church for broad and generous reasons: therefore by all means let her be broad and generous. Yet she was as faintly uneasy as is a child who for the first time walks out into the garden after nightfall.

Sir Robert was speaking of her successes at the Opera House.

"You have a wonderful gift, Miss Tenterden," he was saying. "It must be extraordinary to feel that you are giving the highest possible happiness to thousands of people — a happiness that is above all dispute — undenominational, if I may say so."

She looked at his kindly furrowed face in the moonlight and his deep eyes; and wondered whether he used the metaphor on purpose.

"The Italian opera people wouldn't say so," she said. "They are most denominational."

"But you are not? With regard to them, I mean?"

"I see their place," she said, "though I don't think it's a very high one. It's narrow. Now German opera is as wide as . . . as life. Life isn't made up of melodies, according to rule: it's made up of broad effects."

She felt that here was a man who really wanted to know what she thought; and there is nothing more stimulating. She did not even know, till she said it, that that was what she thought about the Italian and German schools!

"That's an extremely interesting point of view," he said. "Wouldn't you say that this was a melody, though?" (He indicated the sleeping moonlit countryside with his lean hand.)

"Well: there's plenty of melody in Wagner," she said, rearranging her wrap. "Look at the Swan-*motif* — the *Liebestod* — heaps of things. But they slide off and mix with other things, exactly as this will, when the dawn comes."

"Well: that's an undenominational thing to say," he said. "That's just what I mean. You are broad-minded enough to take in the Italian school: but they are not broad enough to take you in."

Again the question crossed her mind as to whether he was saying all this on purpose. The next moment he answered it.

"You'll forgive me, Miss Tenterden, won't you, if I say that your going to the Anglican church to-night gave me very great pleasure. I know it was only a little thing in itself: but I've seen so many fine souls ruined through narrowness that it gives me great satisfaction to see a fine soul that can be broad. I don't like the Italianate mind, either. You don't think me impertinent?"

"Not in the least, Sir Robert. I'm only honoured that you should care to talk to me at all."

"That, if you will forgive me again, is sheer nonsense, Miss Tenterden. You must know that every

one is interested in you. Well: I was saying; I was brought up in a very narrow school of thought myself: and it took me years to get out of it. Your own Faith, of course, is very much larger: but you know, even a large thing can be very narrow: it's the shape, not the size, that matters. I am, I hope, a good Christian, and I always shall be, please God, for the little space of time that remains to me on earth; but I do not count myself attached to any particular sect."

It was amazing how what this gallant old gentleman said, expressed precisely — more precisely than she had dared to express them to herself — the thoughts that were forming so rapidly in her own mind during these last few days: and his personality, and his reputation, and all that he stood for made what he said a thousand times more impressive. This was the man that had been the friend of Gordon, that other apostle of broad intensity, and, like him, a great soldier. Could there be a better height from which to view the world sanely?

"I am very grateful to you," she said. "You have done me good."

He put his hand ever so tenderly on her arm for a moment.

"Don't let them spoil you, Miss Tenterden," he said.

CHAPTER IV

I

The third act of *Tristan* was about to begin; at least the trombones were sounding the *motif* of Isolde's last song, as a hint that in three minutes the doors would be closed.

Max threw away his cigarette.

"Come on," he said. "When the doors are shut nothing can open them again."

"I think that's so tiresome," said Gerald, following him and Guy Markheim along the passage: "and so inartistic too. How much more exquisite to finish one's cigarette, to have one more small whisky and soda and then to come in in the middle. It would burst upon one so much more."

He neither desired nor received any answer. It was one of his murmuring soliloquies: he continued to murmur as they came into the box where the rest of the party was assembled.

It was a very special night indeed, since it was Miss Tenterden's last appearance in Isolde. She was finding the strain a little too much. It was now the last week in June; and she was to confine herself to Elsa once a week until the end of the season. In fact, a week ago an announcement was made in the morning papers that she would not sing Isolde any more at all; but a contradiction appeared in the evening, and more corroborative proclamations on the morning after.

Miss Tenterden would sing Isolde for the last time on Thursday the twenty-eighth; and this was Thursday the twenty-eighth.

There was a big party in the box on the second tier to say good-bye to Isolde; and two extra seats had been put in. Lady Merival and Norah were both there, and their guests were Sir Robert and Guy Markheim, a friend of Max's. Gerald and Max had to sit very much at the back. There had been considerable annoyance a week ago when the announcement had been made; and especially on Max's part, when he had seen in the papers that Miss Tenterden would not sing that part again, as his friend Guy was only just back from Constantinople (where he had been baked to death, as he said, in the Embassy) and had never seen Miss Tenterden. There had been a small sharp argument. Guy had said that Isolde was a real test of Wagnerian ability, far more than was Elsa, since the former was a much more complicated study in psychology, to mention only one point; and with all deference to public opinion, he did not believe that a girl of twenty-two could possibly be adequate either to the psychology or to the music — certainly not to both. It had been very lofty and learned talk indeed; and Max, whose daily bread, so to speak, just now was Wagner, had been extremely dogmatic and positive. Then the announcement had been made by Lord Merival who was reading the *Times* at breakfast. Max had asked for corroboration and had received it. He had been very silent during the rest of breakfast; and had disappeared immediately after. In the evening papers, as has been said, appeared the contradiction of the morning report.

So far, Guy had expressed himself astonished. He certainly knew a little about Wagner, but not as much as he thought; and he therefore was extremely pronounced in his views.

"The real test of Isolde," he had said, as they smoked, "is the *Liebestod* in the Third Act. She has certainly been wonderfully good so far: but I don't take back what I said until I have heard the end."

"My dear chap," Max had said, "if you can't see by now what Miss Tenterden is capable of, I'm sorry for you. But I assure you you won't be disappointed."

"Why the deuce are you taking such an interest in Wagner, all at once? You usedn't to. What do you know about it anyhow?"

"I am taking pains to inform myself," said Max with dignity. "Anyhow I don't pass judgments on what I haven't seen."

Guy had been silent a moment.

"Well: I'll allow it's a very remarkable performance. She can act so damned well, too. It's interesting that you know her. What is she like in private life?"

"You shall meet her," said Max.

II

The saddest music in the world was ending, and the curtain was rising on the castle garden and Tristan lying asleep. A tall wall rose on the left, and over it the head of the young shepherd with his pipe, watching the sea. The branches of a great spreading chestnut hung over the wounded knight; and he tossed and murmured now and again in his delirium.

Tristan was quite competent, though not distinguished by an world-wide fame: but he was young and virile,

and had been excellently received, though not with actual rapture. However, he had sung well: and, after all, Miss Tenterden was the point.

Max knew it all well enough by now: it was his fourth visit; so he leaned back and closed his eyes, listening to the melancholy music, and thinking about Marion.

He was not altogether comfortable about the pressure he had brought to bear on her, to sing the part just once more. She was breakfasting in her room when he arrived: and he had to wait and chafe for half an hour before she came down.

When she arrived at last he was just a shade peevish. She had told him that she had had her throat examined for a little inflammation that she thought she had felt: and that the doctor had corroborated her, advising her if possible to cancel at least half of her engagements: finally he had given her her choice, on certain conditions connected with her practising, as to which part she would relinquish; but had been imperative that she must only sing one.

"And if you want to know details," Marion had said, "it's my tonsils. It appears that they are rather too large. That's absolutely all."

"But good heavens, how annoying this is!" Max had cried. "I've told you about Guy before. Well, he's given up an important engagement to come with us on the twenty-eighth when Mainwaring is coming too. He's been talking nonsense about you and Isolde, and I want to prove him wrong."

"Well: I'm very sorry," said Marion. "Don't be cross. It's not my fault."

Then he really had brought pressure to bear. He had said it was absurd to say that one single performance could make all the difference. He pointed out how extremely unfair it was to the public to cancel an engagement on such short notice. He had said everything that could be said.

"But if I'd broken my leg, I couldn't come," said Marion.

"You haven't broken your leg! That's just it."

After a few minutes she had stood up and begun to finger a jar on the mantelpiece. He had watched her, still talking — and had seen the distress on her face. Finally she had yielded.

"Well: I'll do it this once," she said. "At least I'll telephone to Harrison; if it isn't too late. Will that do?"

"I knew you would ——" he had begun in delight. And then Miss Brent had come in: and he had escaped before she could find out how he had been tampering with her friend.

Well: no harm of any kind had followed. She had been singing magnificently.

He did not look up again till the burst of timbre music that marks the beginning of Tristan's death and Isolde's entrance from the ship that has brought her across the sea from Cornwall. He loved to see her so, tragic and distraught, with her dying lover in her arms. There is a single chord on the harp; and then the 'cello sounds the motif of the love that once united them.

There followed her lament — poignant and broken-hearted. She cannot believe that Tristan is dead. She

has waited so many days: surely he can wait one hour more. He must not, cannot, die of the wound: they must die together, and thus live forever, in the wound of love.

Then, a few minutes later, she too lies dying, by his side, as King Mark bursts in, too late, with his message of life and love for them both; and the agony of the knowledge goads her again into one last fountain of vitality and song. There is the *Liebestod.*

He was watching her with all his eyes now; conscious that Guy too was leaning forward, gripping the bar of the chair before him. He was filled with a strange sense of triumph. Certainly Guy did not know why he was so zealous a defender of this new *prima donna;* but that made his pleasure all the greater. He could see, as he looked past him at the stage, that his mouth was drooped open a little.

What a joy to sight, too, as well as to the ear!

There, in the midst of the great stage stands that figure of incarnate grief and love and triumph, swaying a little, for death is very near. All eyes are fixed on her. She is in white, her black hair bound with gold; a gorgeous sombre mantle dips from her shoulders; her pale face is tense with passion and longing. She is singing in a trance, and visions of heaven and love are before her eyes, though the body of her lover is here; and so proving is the force of her personality, or, rather, so sensitive and eloquent is that instrument which she uses, that there is not one of the audience but feels at least a touch of what is shaking and consuming her. Round her the orchestra is weaving little by little a web of colours and vibrations, gorgeous and

ecstatic, following and supporting that soaring voice. She is the first to sound the memory of the love that was hers, and will be hers again; and the strings and the wind take it up. There is no finale so great in all the world as this. It is drawing to a close at last; all the instruments are surging together, like a tide coming home, higher and higher. Her hands are out: she has hardly a couple of bars more — when, suddenly she catches at her throat. Ah! Max had not noticed that gesture before. But as she hesitates — it would seem in very excess of passion — it seems to him that a note is missed. He is not musician enough to know whether his ear is at fault, or whether a slip has been made: but he notices that a very slight rustle or movement, or both, passes over the audience; and that Guy's head jerks suddenly. Ah! it must be all right: the three notes on "höchste Lust" are clear and distinct; and then, shrill and sweet, the high F sharp that ends it.

The oboi repeat softly the love-motive as she sinks to her death; and the chord of B major three times repeated by the entire orchestra brings down the curtain; and permits the storm of applause that breaks like thunder from the house.

"Well: I take it all back," said Guy, as they made their way patiently behind the ladies down the crowded stairs. "Funny thing, though, that last slip."

"Eh? What?" said Max, who had forgotten all about it.

"Didn't you notice? Just at the very end. She simply left out a note. I think she must have choked. Didn't you see her catch at her throat?"

"Was that it? I thought something went wrong."

"Yes: that was it. People noticed it, though. Didn't you see them rustle? But really, I allow she was superb. And what an amazing voice for a girl of her age and build. Hullo, old man, where are you going?"

"Just a second," said Max. "I've left my gloves."

He disappeared.

"But where is Max?" asked Lady Merival, as she got into her motor.

"Max went back for his gloves, Lady Merival," said Guy.

"This is too tiresome! We can't keep the whole queue waiting."

"Move on there, please. Move on with that car," said a stentorian voice.

"I'll wait for him," said Guy. Lady Merival nodded: and the car moved off.

Max tapped for some time at the little door on the third tier before any one came. He was fairly well known here by now, and no one interfered with him.

"Take my card in to Miss Tenterden," he said, when the man appeared at last. "I've scribbled a note on the back. I'll wait here."

It was rather desolate waiting. He could see through another door the attendants already racing round the house, turning back seats, gathering programmes. He wondered vaguely whether they would find his gloves. What an ass Guy was to upset him like this: and, a further consideration, what an ass he himself was to be upset! Obviously nothing whatever was the matter. She had sung superbly; and she had

ended perfectly. What was one note dropped, and a gesture?

Then he wondered if he might smoke; and thought he'd better not. He didn't in the least want to be turned out until he had got his answer.

In about ten minutes the man returned; and handed him his own card.

"Miss Tenterden's written a line on the back of it, sir," he said.

Max turned it to the light and read.

"Nothing wrong. Just a very small choke. Will write to-morrow. M. T."

"Thanks," said Max.

III

He was sitting all alone in the big smoking-room next morning about eleven o'clock, wondering why he had not heard from her.

It was one of the best sitting-rooms in the house; and certainly would not have been allowed by Lord Merival to be a smoking-room, if it had been possible to make it anything else. But it had a stair all of its own coming straight up from the hall; and it had large mosaic inscriptions above the cornice, intended to be humorous, and all about the vice of smoking. The Australian who had built the house, though lavish, was not very highly educated. The room looked straight out over the park, now bright in the mid-day sunshine.

Max was sitting in a window-seat, staring out.

He had thought a great deal more about the little incident of last night: and was thanking heaven it was no worse. Really he had been intolerably selfish in insisting on her singing against her doctor's advice.

He only wanted to show her off, he perceived now with a deadly clearness of mind, and had deliberately set his own ridiculous ambition before her comfort. Certainly he had succeeded; the applause last night had been as enthusiastic as ever. But he had been abominably selfish; and he was ashamed of himself.

Then he began to think about the future.

He was nearer in time to the date when he would approach his father as to a profession, but he was no nearer it in inclination. He was really and truly afraid of that adequate quiet man who controlled wide destinies, and who seemed so entirely apart from normal passions and desires. He remembered the very painful scene — painful because so quiet — in which he had been informed that obviously he was not intended by providence to be a successful financier, and since no other walk of life seemed open, it would be better for him in future to confine himself entirely to small social duties, and to the pursuit of those sports and amusements in which he was so proficient. One thing only had been insisted on, and that was that he should make himself acquainted with the working of estates. In this manner he would at any rate be a decent sort of landowner when the time came for him to take up his responsibilities. He had consented, because there was nothing else to do. And now he was to re-open the question and himself demand to be given what he did not want.

Max, even now, had very vague ideas as to what his father could do for him. He supposed that just at first — say for six months — he would have to learn again the duties of a confidential clerk; and they appeared to him loathsome. However, it must be done.

Then, say soon after the beginning of the new year, he would probably be promoted in some way: he did not know how; but he fancied that the sons of eminent financiers always are promoted very soon. Then his fortune would begin to have its foundations laid: in a year, even, he might be a director of a company: and directorships, he believed, carried large salaries, if the holders of them bore great names. Well: by then he would be independent; at least he would be independent enough to be able to marry Marion without actually going into the workhouse: her earnings, too, at Covent Garden would be an enormous help, if only she wouldn't give away half of them in ridiculous charities. And all this was only if the worst came to the worst, and his father remained obstinate against the marriage, and behaved, indeed, like a stage-father. If not, the difficulty did not exist: if it did, well, it was surmountable, according to his programme.

He felt a little better when he had run over his plans again; and he began to look out at the carriages driving past. A strip of garden ran between Cheriton House and the road, giving a delightful sensation of aloofness: beyond the road came the railings, and beyond them the broad way of the park and the trees. He could just see, by craning his head, the patch of road immediately opposite the entrance to the Row where he had ridden with Marion.

What a wonderful person she was! Yet, he was not sure whether he would ever have noticed it, if it had not been for her profession. Certainly the stage was an enormous asset, and the operatic stage above all others, since it allowed personalities to express themselves explicitly, in situations that normal life did not provide.

For instance, obviously Marion was a tremendous lover: she had capabilities of passion beyond the ordinary. Yet who would ever have suspected it in that quiet girl, not pretty, not flamboyant in any way, almost obscure. Yet see how in Isolde, last night, for instance, these hidden powers had displayed themselves: and even more in Elsa, for Elsa was far nearer Marion's own character than was the other. Isolde, after all, was a domineering sort of person: consider how she abuses Tristan in the First Act, how she raves at him for a paid servant, engaged to carry her off. But Elsa was different. Elsa was the pathetic maiden, beat upon by the world, with a very well of romance and tenderness and feminine irresolution; and yet capable too of passion, if the object were but worthy.

Would he, then, ever have recognised all this, unless he had seen her act? Certainly he had liked her exceedingly in Scotland, especially when she sang; but he did not think he would ever have proposed marriage to her, actually, if he had never seen her on the stage. He might have fallen in love with her for her own qualities: but it certainly would not have been in that particular way in which, as a matter of fact, he had.

These were very profound musings for Max: and he presently felt the need of a cigarette to help him out.

As he went across from the window-seat to get one from the big silver and cedar box on the table by the sofa, he heard a step coming up the private stair. That was probably Gerald, he thought, looking in from South Street: or it might be Guy. He hoped it was Guy: he would like to talk about *Tristan and Isolde* again.

As he lit his cigarette, a servant came in with a note on a salver.

"There is no answer, sir," he said.

Max took it rather hastily: he saw it was in Marion's handwriting. Then, to enjoy it the better, he went across again to the window-seat, and put up his feet. Then he opened the note.

IV

The note was as follows:

"Dear Old Max,

"This note will upset you dreadfully, I am afraid. But I will tell you at once that it is all right, and that you needn't fuss. You won't have this note at all, as you will see, unless it is all right.

"The fact is that I have to have a very small operation on my throat this morning: and the doctor who will have done it by the time you get this will actually deliver the note himself. I don't want any one else, of course, to know that I have written to you. You'll see it in the papers to-night, I expect. Harrison will be furious: as of course I can't even sing Elsa now again this season: my ridiculous throat will have to heal.

"What I told you last night was perfectly true, so far as I knew then. A doctor was with me when your card came, and was just beginning to look at my throat. Well: it seems that these wretched tonsils of mine quite suddenly swelled up. Goodness only knows how I finished those last four notes. It was just a little dangerous, I gather. He put on some astringent stuff at once, as I was very much inclined to choke: and then told me I must have the operation at once. Poor Maggie was in a dreadful state when I got home and told her.

"I am writing this quite early in the morning. The doctor — my own, I mean, will be here about half-past nine: and he'll take this, as I said, only if it's all entirely satisfactory. *So there is nothing whatever to fuss about.* I've been doing too much all round.

"One thing I want to make quite clear is that it wasn't just the one extra performance that did it. It would certainly have come anyhow: so you mustn't think it's your fault. IT ISN'T.

"Don't come and see me. You can come and inquire if you like, in a proper and stately manner the day after you have seen the news in the papers. Not before.

"My love,

"Yours, M. T.

"PS.— Your kitten is an unending joy. Did I tell you I'd called him Maximilian? It seemed to go with Rhadamanthus, somehow. He's on my bed at this moment."

CHAPTER V

I

Maggie was very content and resigned (as she would have called it) as she sat in the Standing garden, a fortnight later: and indeed there are many things that call for more resignation than does a Hertfordshire garden in the middle of July, especially when one had no reason to hope for anything other than London at that time.

The garden was not very broad: but it was very long, to make up. Here, near the house, between the long side of the music-room and the apse and skirting wall of the tiny church, was plain lawn, coming right up to the boundaries without a single gravel path, since nothing looks better than grass against stone. To be sure it required not only a boy with a mowing machine but a boy with a clippers also to make all tidy right up to the edge: but really that did not take so very much longer, after all. Then came a flagged walk straight across the garden, beyond the end of the music-room: this path led nowhere, but was plainly meant for walking up and down upon — ("Like Satan," Miss Brent had said in one of her daring moods) — and beyond the flagged path and a little grass slope lay the rose-garden.

Now in all England there is no country that grows roses with less trouble than Hertfordshire; and Miss Brent had taken a great deal of trouble on the top of that. The square was divided into a pattern of great beds by grass-paths; and in those beds swarmed the

roses — white, yellow, pink and crimson — while Cramonsie Supérieure, and Dorothy Perkins, and Waltham Bride, and Madame d'Arblay ran up fences and apple-trees and posts in a riot of colour and scent. The roses in the middle were better drilled: General Jacqueminot, Frau Karl Druschki, Captain Hayward and a score of others faced one another resolutely, like Continental Powers, over low bushes of S. Reynolds Hole, Early Blush, Moss, and above all and everywhere, China Pink. Penzance Briars and Scarlet Ramblers occupied all the spaces on the fences that the aristocrats would permit to them.

After that the garden was not so interesting. There was another oblong of turf; a herbaceous border and a low yew-hedge; and beyond that, plebeian cabbages and peas and broad beans and potatoes. Hence the boy, Charlie, issued, morning by morning, with vegetables for the day. At the remotest end of all, three hundred yards from the house was a patch of rough turf, with marigolds and Michaelmas daisies all ready for the autumn, and then the broken hedge and the little stream.

In the middle of the roses sat Maggie, in a holland dress, with a large straw hat, under a garden umbrella: and about her were her little luxuries. These were rather numerous, considering she had only come out for a few minutes until Marion came down.

There was first Rhadamanthus in his cage; because the sun was supposed to be good for him. For the first few minutes he always liked it and chuckled aloud at some secret joke, like a disagreeable and egotistical old man. Then he scratched the back of his head with his foot several times: then he whistled so shrilly that the

hearer's head sang and throbbed: and then he sulked, with his feathers on edge.

Maggie's other luxuries were chiefly devotional in character. They comprised two prayer-books, and three rosaries, because she was never quite sure when she came out which of them she wished to use; and it was better to be on the safe side. She also had with her a small basket full of bits of linen which she was gradually preparing for the service of the altar: she hated, she said, to sit with her hands before her. Yet this was precisely what she was doing this morning; she had so much to think about that she had no time even to pray — at any rate with any formality.

She was in a very mixed frame of mind.

On the official side, so to speak, as the protector and friend of Miss Tenterden, she was of course extremely grieved and upset at the sudden breach in the operatic career. It really was intensely annoying that just the last month of her season had been ruined by this trouble in the throat. The bi-weekly houses, before which Miss Tenterden sang, showed no signs of falling off either in numbers or enthusiasm; and it is never good for the future of a singer to begin with the reputation of being the kind of person who is suddenly ill.

Yet, on the domestic side, the pleasure that Marion's friend had in the turn events had taken, far more than compensated for the distress of Miss Tenterden's protector. It was, first, simply delightful to have her all to herself, out of the rush of London: and it was, next, delightful, because it really gave her an opportunity of winning back, in a sense, the intimacy that she had thought herself to be losing; or, if that was too strong

an expression, of getting into that particular kind of touch with her friend which the excitements of London had overlaid.

Here, then, sat Maggie Brent, three days after their arrival, content at last. Her last trace of anxiety had been dispersed by the visit of the great London doctor half an hour ago, and his declaration that the throat was practically well again, although, of course, Miss Tenterden must not attempt any singing again for the present, and must on no account smoke a cigarette.

II

It was half-past eleven before Marion at last appeared in the doorway of the cottage. She shaded her eyes a moment with her hand: then she came slowly out, carrying a sheaf of letters, and the morning paper. Maximilian was on her shoulder.

It would have been hard to imagine anything less like the traditional idea of a famous *prima donna*, thought Maggie, as the girl came across the grass. She was in an absolutely simple white dress, with white shoes and stockings; she was bareheaded; and she had just the look of a rather sleepy child. Her lips smiled a little as she met Maggie's eyes: the rest of her face remained drowsily unmoved.

"Some charming letters," she said, in a voice that was certainly rather hoarse; but what can you expect after an operation in the throat?

"I should think they ought to be charming," said Maggie indignantly; "after all you've done for them. Here, sit down, my dear; and don't talk too much. You look tired."

"I'm tired with ten hours' sleep, then," said the girl.

"Look here! isn't this nice, from Sir Robert Mainwaring?"

She tossed an open letter into her friend's lap; and, as she did so, another in its envelope, though open, fell on the grass; and Maggie glanced at it.

"Yes," said Marion sedately, "it's from Mr. Merival." She stooped and picked it up. Maximilian took the opportunity to leap on to the grass. Then she sat down, while Maggie looked through the letter that had been thrown to her.

"Yes: my dearest. Most charming," she said presently, giving it back.

"And here's one from Norah. Quite nice. And a dozen from total strangers. Really, people are delightful. And five from firms that make lozenges — only five this morning: there were eleven yesterday. I shouldn't have thought there were — let's see — sixteen different firms in the world that make lozenges. And there are three separate samples too. I left them in the house. You can have them for Rhadamanthus, if you like. How cross he looks!"

"My dear, you mustn't talk too much."

"Oh! that's all right," said Marion. "As long as I don't talk loud. By the way, Sir John said I should be able to sing this autumn, he thought — not in public, I mean. That's rather a bore. I didn't think it would be as long as that."

"All the better," said Maggie rather savagely. "You've been overdoing it all round, my darling. I never dreamed it would mean so much work and late hours: and you know you're not strong."

"I am sorry to contradict ——" began the girl.

"Well; you're not what I call strong. You've got

nerves; and there's nothing so exhausting. And then look how fat all other *prima donnas* are! They've got to be. They can't do the work without. Reserve tissues. Like starving men on a desert island."

"Dear: don't get excited. It's bad for me. Oh! look at Maximilian pretending to be a lion. . . . What a lot of pious books! Do you hold one in each hand, or what?"

Maggie paid no attention.

"And then all those men running after you! My dear; I'm going to give you a good talking to some day when you're better. You're getting quite worldly."

Marion smiled.

"Do you hear that, Maximilian?" she murmured.

"However, you can't be worldly here: that's one comfort. And I'm very glad we managed to sell the motor again. Otherwise you'd be running about all over the place."

"Yes: by the way; I've got a word to say about that," said the girl. "What on earth do you mean by getting round me when I was, so to speak, prostrate on a bed of sickness; and selling my present to you? I've never spoken my mind about that yet. You wait till I get my voice back!"

"My dear! Not so loud!"

"And you won't gain much by it, because I've ordered a pony and a governess cart instead. It'll be here by Monday. Charlie will look after it; and I shall drive."

Maggie sat up. Marion made a long arm and snatched up Maximilian who was stalking a daisy.

"You haven't!"

"Indeed I have! Mr. Merival very kindly saw to it for me. (Don't claw so, Maximilian.) He says in this letter that it'll be here by Monday at the latest. So you see what you've got by it all."

Maggie threw up her hands; and two pious books and one rosary fell to the ground.

"I've never seen anything like it," she said. "We shall be ruined."

III

It was not very easy for Marion to keep up this kind of thing; and yet she knew that it must be done.

She was perfectly aware that her relations with Maggie were not altogether what they had been a year ago; and that Maggie was aware of it too; and she was quite determined that there should be a restoration, or at least that Maggie should think that there was. For a complete restoration there could not be, so long as the secret remained untold, and when it was told — Marion did not like to contemplate the result.

For the only thing in the world about which Maggie was really unbending was her religion, or rather the principles of it, in theory. On practically everything else she could be made to yield. She broke her Rule of Life continually, but she possessed one, in theory. She left bills unpaid for months and lying about her table, open, till they were thrown away; but she paid them finally. Rhadamanthus could make her do anything to which he really applied himself, in all such matters as the covering or the uncovering of his cage, but he could not make her ever really angry with him. In the same way Marion could always get a Probable Opinion from Maggie that on this or that particular Sunday she need

not go to mass, but she could never get an opinion against going to mass as a practice. When she contemplated, therefore (which she did as little as possible), the necessity of telling her friend that she was going to contract a marriage which the Church declared to be no marriage at all, she was honestly perturbed by the effect it would have on her. She could even imagine Maggie solemnly packing up her things, seizing Rhadamanthus' cage in one hand and as many objects of devotion as she could carry, in the other, and departing forever. In fact she could not conceive Maggie doing anything else.

She felt so much better this morning, after her ten hours' sleep, that even as she sat with Maggie among the roses she began to think of this prospect again; and she hardly listened at all as Maggie read to her scraps from the *Daily Mail*. It was enough to say, "Dear me!" from time to time, to keep her going.

There was nothing new to think of: it was only the old thoughts over again, for no conceivable circumstance could alter the situation. It was impossible to demand the "promises" from Max; it was impossible not to marry him. That was all that was to be said. Her single consolation lay in the knowledge that at any rate she need not say anything just yet. This summer, at any rate, they could have in peace.

But she began to grow a little restless, and omitted the "Dear me!" so obviously on two or three occasions, that at last Maggie glanced at her with the peculiarly piercing look that eyes always have that are bent over the tops of spectacles.

"You're not listening to a word I'm reading," she

said. "And it's been most interesting. All about Florida and the Chinese."

"I know I'm not. I'm bothered about something. Why hasn't Father Denny been to see us?"

"My dear, would you like to see him?" asked Maggie, all spiritual helpfulness in a moment.

Marion stood up, and began to fidget with a rose belonging to General Jacqueminot: it began to fall petal by glowing petal under her fingers.

"I don't know. Yes. No, I don't think so. Go on about the Chinese, Maggie. I like to hear it."

She sat down again.

After ten minutes or so Maggie said she had read enough, and that she must really go round to the church for her "hour." She was about forty minutes late already. But Marion was so absorbed in her own thoughts that she did not put two and two together; and it was not until she looked up, after five minutes' more solitary meditation, and saw the little priest coming out through the house, carrying his hat in his hand, that she perceived, what ought to have been evident to her from the first — that Maggie would inevitably have gone straight to the presbytery and told him to go and administer priestly consolation next door. She drew a breath. Well, here he was, anyhow. Perhaps she would talk to him as she had thought of doing just now. It was possible that the Jesuit had taken too rigorous a view of things; and that a simple little country priest might be more lax.

"Ah! Father," she said. "How kind of you to look in! Won't you come indoors? I was coming in myself."

IV

It was a quarter of an hour later before she realised that she had, so to speak, caught another Tartar, and that this one was more prickly, if less impressive, than that perfectly brutal priest of Farm Street.

So soon as he had really grasped the situation, he had sat suddenly upright in his chair. (She had taken him into the music-room as affording less opportunity of the conversation being overheard.)

"Miss Tenterden," he said, "have I really understood you rightly? Are you really asking me whether there is no way by which you may be permitted to live with this man, without Catholics knowing that you are not married to him. And are you really serious in saying that you mean ——"

"Father, that is scarcely the way to put it. You must please remember that I shall myself consider that I am married to him in . . . in the sight of God."

"In the eyes of the secular laws of England, you mean," he said.

"In this case I regard them as one and the same thing. Surely society, in the last resort, is the authority that decides what is a true marriage and what is not?"

"I am amazed to hear you speak like that," said the priest. "A Catholic from the cradle, educated in a convent, surely knows that marriage is one of the sacraments, and therefore the Church alone has a right to say what does or does not constitute it."

His little round eyes became pin-points of light behind his spectacles, and his mouth grew tight and severe. Marion jerked her head impatiently. What drearily

narrow rubbish it all was! What a fool she had been to hope for any reasonableness from this ill-educated little man!

"I see it's no good arguing," she said. "I spoke to another priest, too, in London."

"And he told you exactly what I am telling you, did he not?"

"Of course he did. All priests say the same thing. I ought to have remembered that."

"Do you expect us to take different views of God's Truth?"

His manner was a surprising revelation to her. Hitherto he had always been a little afraid of her, a little deferential, a trifle too much disposed to wait on her moods, a shade too anxious to please. She had wished sometimes that he would appear rather more of a man. And now something had awakened within him; hard surfaces had suddenly appeared whose existence she had never suspected. It was like leaning against a familiar old cushion and finding a large brick in its centre, with angles that hurt. She lost her temper.

"It depends what one thinks God's Truth is. Personally I am inclined to think it is considerably larger than — than you do: considerably larger than any Church can make it."

"Am I right," asked the priest, "in understanding you to imply that you no longer believe the Catholic Church to be the organ of that Truth?"

"*An* organ, certainly," said Marion.

He rose. She watched him with a tinge of deliberate insolence in her eyes, leaning back in her deep chair.

"I do not think," he said, "that any good can be

served by continuing this conversation now. The confessional is the proper place to deal with the subject. But I am bound to tell you, Miss Tenterden, that if you presented yourself in these dispositions and with these intentions, in any confessional in the world, you would be refused absolution."

"So I understood from the other priest whom I consulted," she murmured.

Then his pastoral spirit awoke. He clasped his old flat hat nervously on his breast.

"Miss Tenterden; I entreat you to reconsider the matter, before you wreck your immortal soul. I simply will not take what you have told me as final. I cannot believe it. You have been such a model, always. The little band of Catholics here have always looked up to you so much. I cannot believe it. Do not say anything more at present. I regard what you have told me as having been told under the seal, as you asked me. But think it all over once more: and then come and see me — in a day or two — in a day or two: and we can put all this right, and you will give your word to think no more of it ——"

He paused: there was a tone of entreaty in his voice; but she hardened her heart and would not even make him happy by a little prevarication. He had better know the truth once and for all. She said nothing, but watched him under half-raised eyelids, softly waving the palm fan she had taken from the mantelpiece just now.

"Think of it again, Miss Tenterden," he said. "Think even of what it will mean to Miss Brent, if nothing else will ——"

She stood up, and gave him her hand.

"Thank you, Father Denny. Good morning. You know your way out, don't you?"

V

"Why, who's this?" asked Maggie in a very audible voice, as a clerical figure came out from the house, preceded by Jenny, as they sat at tea that same afternoon among the roses once more, in the shade of the house. "Why: it's Mr. Cholmondeley. Whatever has he come for?"

Mr. Cholmondeley was the Rector of Standing, but Maggie was most particular not to call him so. However excellent a man, he was nothing but an interloper and a thief. There had been no Rector of Standing since the sixteenth century: but Father Denny was the nearest that could be got. Such was her belief, and such her language. Yet she could welcome him as a man.

He was a pleasant-looking gentleman, with a rather marked Oxford manner, clean-shaven, dressed in dark grey, with an ebony stick, and carrying a Panama hat. He would not have dreamed of describing himself as a priest, unless he were very hard pressed, when he would not explicitly deny it. He fulfilled perfectly the ideal of a Christian gentleman living in a village. He wore the old high collars and white ties, though he was still a fairly young man; and he took quite an interest in music, and therefore in Miss Tenterden. He had called once before, soon after their arrival in Standing, but never since. He was a bachelor.

"Why, Mr. Cholmondeley!" cried Maggie. "How nice of you to come in: and just at tea-time, too!"

"I thought I must just come and inquire about Miss

Tenterden," he said, shaking hands with them both. "But there doesn't seem much need."

"I am simply robust," said Marion.

"But you're rather hoarse," he said.

"Well: she only had the operation a fortnight ago. What can you expect?" demanded Maggie.

"You see, you belong to us all now," he said to Marion, with a very pleasant air. "How very delightful it must be to feel that you're a sort of national possession. I was horrified when I saw the news in the paper. Tell me: when do you mean to sing again?"

They proceeded to talk Opera; and Marion became vivacious.

But she took a distinct pleasure in contrasting this genial personage, so well shaven, so wholesome, so suitably dressed for a hot day in July, with the little priest with whom she had talked this morning. Father Denny could not be called attractive, on a hot day. He wore precisely the same cut of coat as in winter, only of alpaca: it came down to exactly the spot to which a coat should not come down, so that the observer was always in a state of tantalising doubt as to whether it were a short coat made too long, or a long coat made too short. His trousers were of a wear-resisting fabric, so stout that they had had time to become moulded to the shape of his legs. His hat was flat and shapeless, and he had been wearing this morning a celluloid collar that was perceptibly yellow: below his collar was a black stock of imitation watered silk, with three faceted buttons of jet that fastened nothing. His boots were ever longer than his feet, and were sharply turned up at the toes. All these things she considered and tasted over

with a distinct sensation of pleasure, contrasting them with the appearance of this pleasant gentleman in grey — with the sight of his creased trousers, his low, well-polished shoes, the whiteness of his linen. She contrasted too the cultivated ease of this man with the abrupt timidity of the priest; she even began to make speculative contrasts between the undoubtedly broad and genial views of this man and the narrow dogmatism and unperceptiveness to which she had listened this morning.

Maggie, too, could be charming, even to a clergyman, so long as controversy did not obtrude itself; and certainly nothing seemed likely to obtrude itself in any direction whatever, under the suave influences of this visitor. She bristled a little, for a while: she inspected with great earnestness a small gold object that hung from his watch-chain until she was quite sure it was only an innocent coin and not the symbol of a heretical society; she dragged the tails of her coat, so to speak, across the conversation, by speaking with emphasis of "the church of the place"— and adding —"I mean of course our own, here — the Catholic church"; but he took it so much as a matter of course, and even used the word "Catholic" itself of his entertainer's views, that she relaxed, and settled down to amity.

It was as he was standing up to go that he finally won her heart.

"Miss Brent," he said, "you have never been up to see Standing church, yet, I think? I wish you would come, with Miss Tenterden, and let me show you over."

She instantly became alert and a little fierce.

"It would be rather painful to me, Mr. Cholmondeley. You see ——"

"Ah! I quite understand," he said. "You feel, very naturally, that I am something of an interloper. Well, upon my word, I'm inclined to agree with you, when I look at that broken holy-water font — I think you call it? — and the door that once led up to the rood-loft. I really do not quite see what business I have in the place at all. All those Church-Defence meetings, you know — and all that!" (His eyes twinkled a little.) "However, one must take the world as one finds it. Let me put it another way. Won't you and Miss Tenterden come up one day and look over your church — your old family property that you've been driven out of?"

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Maggie, as the garden-gate clashed after the Rector. "I shall make a Novena for that man's conversion! Did you hear what he said, my dearest?"

"I noticed he had a sense of humour," said Marion. "That's a great thing, you know. And Maximilian liked him. And that's another."

CHAPTER VI

I

Max was quite recovering from the horror with which he had first received the news of Marion's little operation. He was beginning to see that really he was not responsible in any kind of way; that the collapse of the voice would have come in any case; and in order to keep himself quite comfortable in his mind he wrote to Marion about twice a week.

So far he had not seen her since her operation, except for five minutes just before she left London: and that was not a satisfactory interview, as she was allowed hardly to speak at all, and Miss Brent had been present throughout. However, it had been something to see her; she had looked a little pulled down and fragile, but was entirely herself, except for the hoarseness that discoloured the few words she spoke.

A week later he conceived the idea of going to see her in the country; and it was here that his friend Guy proved useful: for Guy was the possessor of a car which would cover the distance very easily in the morning, and again back to town between tea and dinner. A few notes passed to and fro; and three days later, Miss Brent looked out of the window just before lunch and saw that the visitors had come.

Max was very happy as he came out through the house with Maggie and saw Marion coming to meet them. It was a perfect day, and really the sight he saw was a

picture. The roses formed a blaze of colour, bright as a tapestry over the green of the grass and of the yew-hedge, and, set right aginst it was the white figure of the girl he loved. Her whole face smiled, and her eyes were kind and steady. She carried Maximilian on her shoulder.

"This is too delightful, Mr. Merival," she said; and he noticed with delight that the hoarseness seemed sensibly diminished. "But there is nothing whatever to do here. . . . How do you do, Mr. Markheim? Mr. Merival hasn't introduced us: but I know who you are. And this is Maximilian, please. Mr. Merival gave him me on my first night: he's my mascot."

"We only want to sit still," said Max. "You are really better, Miss Tenterden?"

"I am absolutely well — except for my voice. Yes: sit there, please." (She lifted a heavy book from the grass by her chair.) "Look here! I've been going through *Lohengrin* — it's dreadfully professional of me; but I love it."

She turned the pages tenderly.

"My dear," said Maggie; "you mustn't talk too much. She will talk too much, Mr. Markheim. These gentlemen must talk instead."

"She's a dragon," said Marion. "Indeed, I may talk: but I mustn't talk loud; and I mustn't attempt to sing. That's the verdict."

"You'll be all right for the next winter season, I suppose?" said Guy.

"Why, of course. And I mean to begin my exercises again in October, at the latest."

They began to talk shop. Guy knew quite enough to make a decent show of conversation on musical mat-

ters, and Max was interested enough in the talkers to listen. They talked shop the whole of lunch, and were beginning to run dry when they came out again for coffee. It was not till coffee was drunk and Max was finishing his second cigarette that Guy was able to execute the design of leaving the two together that had been formulated almost without words on the way down.

"Miss Brent," he said quite frankly: "I am sure these two want to talk. I wish you'd show me that church next door. I'm interested in Catholic churches. I suppose that's one?"

The bribe was too great. Maggie's eyes darted round the faces; but the expression on both Marion's and Max's was so utterly void of guile that she could not resist.

"Why: I shall be delighted, Mr. Markheim."

"Be away quite a long time," said Marion tranquilly. "I want to talk deer-stalking and Scotland to Mr. Merival; and that's worse even than musical shop."

She looked with serene laughing eyes, and Maggie was reassured.

"Come along, Mr. Markheim," she said. "You shall see all over it. Don't let her talk too loud, will you, Mr. Merival?"

"I'll call for you if she does," he said.

II

"How extremely clever both you and Mr. Markheim must be," said Marion softly as Guy disappeared after Maggie. "You did that beautifully. Poor dear! But you haven't told him, I suppose?"

"Good Lord, no! But he understood quickly enough that I wanted to talk to you. That was all."

"Won't he suspect anything?" smiled the girl, scratching Maximilian under the chin, as he sprawled on her lap with his claws out.

"It doesn't matter a straw if he does. That's enough of that. Don't let's waste time. How are you, really?"

"That's enough of that too, then. I'm perfectly well, as I said, except for my throat; and that just wants time. But I'm glad you've come. There's something else I want to tell you, and I didn't like to write it."

"Yes?"

She pulled her chair a shade nearer to him.

"It's lucky I mustn't talk loud, isn't it? Well: you remember that I told you there was a bother connected with my religion? And that I wouldn't tell you? Well, I want to tell you, now. Do you mind?"

"My darling; tell me exactly what you like, and no more."

He comfortably lit his third cigarette.

"You're smoking too much. Well; that's not the point. (Well, my dear, if you must go, you must.)" She set the kitten down. "The fact is that I've been to see two priests to find out if there wasn't some way round. Well, there isn't. And I think it's only fair to tell you."

Max looked faintly perturbed at this introduction.

"It's nothing that can possibly make any difference ——" he began.

"Good gracious, no, you ridiculous person! I'm not going to let it make any difference: that's the whole

point. Well: in one sentence it is this: My Church makes certain demands about my marriage which I don't mean to comply with."

"And what's the consequence of that?"

"The consequence of that is although the marriage will be perfectly legal and valid in the eyes of everybody else, it won't be in the eyes of Catholics."

Her hoarse voice trembled a little.

"You mean —— ?" began Max.

"I mean that I shan't be able to live as a Catholic — or go to the sacraments: and that Catholics will believe — or pretend to believe "— (her voice shook a little, but with indignation) —"will pretend to believe that you and I aren't married when we are."

"But, Good Lord ——"

"Yes, I know. Have you ever heard anything so absurd? It's all this hateful system. I went to two priests — two priests, not just a casual one — one of them was quite well educated: and they both said the most awful things."

Max's eyes gleamed a little.

"Did they?"

"No: there's nothing to be angry about. They had to say it. They couldn't, as priests, say anything else. It's just part of the system. But isn't it abominable?"

"You mean," said Max, slowly assimilating these things, "that Catholics won't recognise our marriage as a real marriage at all — that Miss Brent, for instance ——"

"I know. She's just the single one I do mind about."

"You poor dear!" said Max, with sudden tenderness. "What a time you must have had!"

"Well," confessed Marion, "I have about her. But I don't care the slightest about any one else. They can believe what they like. But, you know, Maggie will have to be told sometime."

"But are you sure Miss Brent will take the same view?"

"Oh, my dear: you don't understand," whispered the girl almost sharply. "Catholics are all the same. They just believe what's told them, like so many sheep."

"But, my darling, you don't believe it?" said the bewildered Max.

"Of course I don't," said the girl passionately. "I know it's all a lot of narrow-minded rubbish. But then, you see, I'm not a good Catholic."

"Perhaps Miss Brent isn't, either," suggested Max hopefully. He really could not quite take in the acuteness of the crisis, even now. (He had had an idea that Papal decrees were abolished at the Reformation.)

Marion laughed, noiselessly, and a little bitterly.

"Oh! but she is. She's a convert: and a *dévote* too."

There was a pause.

All this kind of thing was so completely remote from Max's experience that, although he saw that the affair was a real strain on Marion's mind, he honestly could not quite see why. Religion, to him, was not a practical thing at all: it was a particular kind of emotion which certain kinds of people had, and others had not. It was a matter of choice, or perhaps of temperament: and the amount of intellectual ideas that you held along with the emotion depended again on

temperament, or perhaps education. Religion was like clear soup: you might like it, or you might not: it might be hot or cold or tepid: and its dogmas were like those little dough alphabets that float about in clear soup. If you were very much interested, and had a good many letters, you might even think they formed words. Catholics, as a class, he knew, had a great many dogmas and rules; he could not conceive how it was possible that they should really hold them, but some of them certainly appeared to do so. Very well, then, it was no affair of his. Live and let live. He had no objection.

"Tell me what these things are," he said presently; "I mean the things that your Church wants you to do."

Marion moved a little in her chair, and took up a paper umbrella to shade her face. The sun had moved from behind the tree-tops, and the shadow had shifted.

"Well," she said. "First there's one about being married in a Catholic church, only. They have the impertinence to say that a priest mustn't conduct the ceremony at all, if any other clergyman has anything to do with it."

"That sounds pretty average bigoted," remarked Max.

"Then there are what are called the 'promises.' The Catholic, so far as I understand, has to promise to do his or her utmost to convert the other — this is in a mixed marriage, of course — and the Non-Catholic has to promise to leave the other entirely free in every way to practise her religion."

"A trifle one-sided," observed Max judicially, watching Maximilian, who, in the edge of a garden-bed, lay,

flattened and swaying, in preparation for an assault on a feathery head of grass.

"But that's not all," continued the girl steadily. "If there are any children, both sides have to promise that they shall all be brought up Catholics. Even if the Catholic parent dies, the other would have to keep his promise."

"Oh, dear me!" said Max. "That really is beyond anything."

"Isn't it incredible? And if you won't promise all these things, they won't give a dispensation, and the marriage isn't valid! Have you ever heard anything like it?"

"Do you mean to say that they think it isn't valid, if it's conducted even in a Protestant church — by a clergyman?"

"I do indeed."

He threw away the end of his cigarette. Maximilian skipped away, as on springs.

"And educated people believe all that?"

She jerked her umbrella towards the apse of the little church.

"Father Denny does. Not that he's educated, though. But all Catholics believe it. The Jesuit Fathers believe it."

"Jesuit Fathers, eh? And can't even they find a way round it, somehow?"

(He spoke from the simplest conviction.)

"No; not even the Jesuit Fathers," said the girl bitterly.

Again there was silence. Max was vaguely contemplating the inexplicable fact that there really were educated people who believed what was obviously non-

sense. He stared at the roses, chewing a stalk of grass he had just picked out of the lawn beside his low deck-chair. Then a further thought occurred to him.

"But look here," he said. "What's going to become of you after we're married, if you mayn't go to your church any more? Have you thought about that?"

(Had she thought about that!)

"It's only the sacraments I mayn't go to," she said. "No one can stop me going to mass if I want to."

"But why should you want to?" he asked innocently. "If you don't believe in your Church, why need you go? Why can't you just join the Church of England? I belong to that," he added as an afterthought.

She suddenly laughed gently.

"Oh! Max: you are a dear! I wish I was like you. But it isn't as simple as all that, you know. I really don't think I could quite do that. I suppose it's associations and so on. I don't know."

"But it seems to me very illogical," pursued Max, rather proud of himself as a theological controversialist. "I don't see how you can be both a Catholic and not a Catholic at the same time."

He was honestly trying to see the point.

Marion flushed a little.

"But I am a Catholic," she said. "At least — good gracious! what a bother it all is!"

"Think about it," he continued. "Do you know Sir Robert Mainwaring was talking about you the other day after dinner, and said almost that very thing. He said — what was it exactly? . . . Oh! I know. He said you were 'too large-minded to be denominational.'

I thought he was rather talking through his hat, at the time. But I see what he means."

Marion sat upright.

"Max, don't let's talk about it any more at all. I've told you what was on my mind. I thought I'd better. And now it's not going to be on my mind any more. Except about Maggie," she added. "Let's leave it."

IV

Max wondered a little, when the other two came back, that the thought of Maggie was so great a burden as it evidently was, on Marion's mind. Of course, she had been very kind and all that; but her personality did not impress him. He could not understand how any very tender associations could entwine themselves round the idea of Miss Brent.

Maggie was in high spirits when she returned.

"We've been all round it," she said: "and we looked at all the Stations, particularly, as they were painted by Father Denny's sister before she died. Mr. Markheim thought them so devotional; didn't you, Mr. Markheim? Father Denny came in in the middle. I think he thought we were suffragettes. And we looked at the Lady chapel, which always reminds me of the catacombs, because it's so dark and damp. I like that. It was a dishonest builder, I am afraid, who put in bad material, poor thing! He died soon after, too, just as one might have expected. And I've brought a bit of convolvulus root that I pulled out by the west door. I thought we might plant it by the roses and let it run all over them."

"That's bind-weed," said Marion hoarsely. "If

you let it run all over them, as you say, there won't be any roses."

"Dear! Is that so? Why, of course it is! But you'll put it in water, my dearest, won't you? So sad, growing by the church like that, and then being pulled up suddenly. You're looking rather tired, my dear. I hope Mr. Merival hasn't let you talk too much. We heard your voices quite plainly once or twice."

"Ah! we were talking about religion," said Marion serenely.

"Why that's just what Mr. Markheim and I were doing," said Maggie delightedly. "I was telling him all about Catholicism, and how I was once a Protestant myself. Wasn't I, Mr. Markheim?"

"Yes," said Mr. Markheim.

"That's why we were so long," went on Maggie; "it takes such a long time to explain properly. Why, where's Rhadamanthus all this time? I quite thought I had brought him out. He's missing all the sun: and Maximilian's getting it all, instead."

She hurried in.

"I hope you were properly interested, Mr. Markheim," whispered Marion.

He smiled delightfully.

"Miss Brent was really absorbing," he said. "I haven't met such a whole-hearted devotee for a long time. It's always so with converts, I understand. You're not a convert, Miss Tenterden, are you?"

"No," said Marion.

"Here he is, and so cross at being forgotten," cried a cheerful voice from the cottage door.

She tripped a little over a croquet hoop as she came towards them, and the cage swayed dangerously.

"Damn you!" said Rhadamanthus, with an extraordinary clearness of enunciation.

V

The two women stood at the cottage door, just within the garden gate, to see the motor start, an hour later.

"Sorry we've got to get back so early," said Guy genially as he slipped on his driving-gloves. "We're both dining early."

"Going to the Opera?" whispered Marion; who, as before, held Maximilian on her shoulder.

"I should think not," said Guy emphatically. "I'm not going near it till — when is it? — next winter season."

Marion smiled. It was pleasant to hear such things.

She let her eyes rest on Max, as Guy was winding up the handle. He was buttoning up his coat. How sane and wholesome he looked: and how sane and wholesome had been his conversation this afternoon!

"Come again," she said suddenly.

He nodded.

"If we may," he said.

"Why can't they invent something that'll save all that trouble?" demanded Maggie. "Look at poor Mr. Markheim — how hot he's getting. Marion, my darling, are you sure you oughtn't to have something over your head? The sun's right on it, you know. Ah! it's off now. That's right."

She nodded and smiled again with the most friendly feelings as Guy, with his hands on the wheel, saluted

for the last time. Max lifted his cap. Then the car slid off.

"What a charming man Mr. Markheim is," said Maggie as they lingered, watching. "We had such a long talk; and he said at the end that I had given him some quite new light on Catholicism. And I saw him put his finger into the holy-water stoup as we came out. Perhaps it was only to see what was in it; because he didn't make the sign of the cross or anything. But I thought it so nice of him. He did it so reverently."

CHAPTER VIII

I

"How early you're down," said Maggie, coming into the music-room after her interview with the housekeeper next morning, and finding Marion at the piano. "Why, my dear! Is anything the matter?"

The girl rose.

"I think not," she said. "But . . . but I'm not quite sure."

Maggie regarded her.

"There! it's all right," said Marion, putting an arm over the other's shoulders. "But I suddenly got nervous. Maggie! If I don't get my voice back, I think I should die."

"My dearest! What in the world has put that into your head?"

Maggie craned her head round to see Marion's face; her eyes looked strained and anxious.

"I couldn't sleep very well," said the girl quickly, moving off to the hearth: "I suppose I got excited yesterday — all that talk about *Lohengrin*."

"My darling; but Sir John never said a word ——"

"No: I know he didn't. That's just it: and I didn't dare to ask him, after the first day or two."

"You're getting morbid," pronounced Maggie.

"I daresay."

"You're getting morbid. Why, thousands of people have their tonsils cut, and you'd never know the difference. I think I had my own cut when I was a child.

Oh! no, that was adenoids; but it comes to the same thing."

She talked on rapidly. Marion said nothing at all. She stood quite quietly by the hearth, now looking at Maggie who flowed on without a pause, now letting her eyes stray round the tall room, now resting them for a meditative moment on the big chest where her music was kept.

The girl did not quite know when her anxiety had begun. She had asked, immediately before the operation, and as soon as she was allowed to speak after it, whether there was any real risk of losing her voice, and had been told emphatically, by the greatest throat specialist in London that there was no sort of reason to fear anything at all. Then by an act of will she had put away even the suggestion of forebodings, and had serenely made her arrangements, cancelling all autumn engagements and forming a new provisional agreement, to be confirmed on the first of September, to sing again at Covent Garden in the following January. It was an act of faith that she made, simply because any other prospect was intolerable. Then she had come down to Standing, and little by little, forebodings had returned. They had culminated this morning.

She had awakened early, just in that short period before the dawn, when the sun is not risen, but yet the world is visible — in that period when birds begin to call to one another in sudden questioning phrases, as if for reassurance that the resurrection has indeed come. She had crept to the window and looked out, pulling aside the yellow curtains, upon that grey, motionless, dew-soaked lawn. Not a thing moved: the

roses hung, each heavy and still upon the stalk. A faint mist lay over the further end of the garden, rising from the invisible stream. Against the yellow wash of colour over the eastern hills the apse of the church jutted out, stern and forbidding, like the prow of an antique ship.

It is a strange death-like time; there is no joy in it, unless the mind is on a high and secure plane: to those who do not live from within but lean on exterior support, the effect is that of a pale face with open eyes, that asks no questions, but is in itself one doubt. She shivered and went back to bed.

Then, indeed, the questions had begun; for she was beginning to understand, in the silence of the country, how passionately she had become absorbed, not merely in the actual life of the stage, though that was the centre and mainspring of all, but in the whole life for which it stood; and there is no doubt but that in that particular hour of the early morning, before the reassuring sounds and sights bring the mind back again to sanity as some would say, to conventional illusion, as others would say, the power of self-torment is at its climax.

As she lay there in the faint yellow light, not only did the memory of these last few months reassert itself with an immense force, so that she saw herself, as she had seldom realised herself at the time, the centre of that particular kind of romantic attention which the stage alone can give; but she also perceived, with a dreary vividness of which she was quite incapable at other times, what her life would be in the future, should those horrible forebodings, never far from the surface (however resolutely she had crushed them down),

justify themselves. Not only would there go from her, once and for all, the passionate interest of her art in itself, the intoxicating excitement of those scenes in which her duty demanded that she should play upon her own nature as upon an organ, drawing out strange stops seldom used in real life, forming combinations for which experience has only a very exceptional use, but she would also lose practically all she knew of the world, since the one condition on which she had found entrance into it, would be violated. And all depended on a few little vessels and sinews and muscles in her throat, which had lately felt the shock of the knife.

Then indeed she turned to the image of Max in a kind of despair — since he was the one fragment of that world that would remain to her, the one reality in it which she had made her own. All else, she was clear sighted enough to understand, would no longer be hers, if she once lost that which had introduced her to it. All those men that hung round her, all the women that flattered her — these, she knew well enough, were interested in the *prima donna* not in Marion Tenterden. Max alone would be left. Not Norah; not Gerald: no one. And, even as she regarded Max, a doubt came upon her so sickening in its intensity that she dared face it no more. . . .

She had fallen asleep again about six: when she woke, the room was bright with sunshine, and Jenny was bringing in the breakfast tray. Yet just so much of the nightmare remained as to cause her to get up an hour before her usual time, and to go down, restless, to the piano. That, at least, might reassure her.

"Well," she said, when Maggie had run down at

last, "suppose we don't talk about it any more. What about going up and looking at Mr. Cholmondeley's church this morning?"

"My dear!" answered Maggie. "I simply can't. I've promised Father Denny to clean out the sacristy."

"Ah! well, I think I shall stroll up," said Marion. "I'll be back before twelve."

II

Mr. Cholmondeley was extremely gratified when, as he strolled round his garden with a pipe and the *Times* newspaper before going in to deal with a sermon for Sunday, he heard the clash of the gate and saw Miss Tenterden, looking very graceful and cool, with a white parasol over her head, coming up the path.

He was a perfectly intelligent man, and knew quite well that Miss Tenterden was become something of a personage in a certain section of life; and he had sufficient sound worldliness to appreciate that section. His type is not in the present day a very common one among the English clergy: he was not perhaps very deep, but he did not pretend to be, and he had wide sympathies: for instance, he dressed for the evening like a layman; he had a small kennel of very well-bred bull-terriers; he visited London for at least three or four weeks, all told, every year, when he would frequent the theatres and even condescend to the music-halls: he had been known to be present at a prize-fight and was not in the least ashamed of it: he treated his fellow-clergy with a tolerant humour, and was treated by them as something of a good-natured and therefore dangerous heretic. With all this he was an admirable pastor to his people, though he resembled a small squire

rather than an ecclesiastic: he preached shrewd and homely little sermons, chiefly about the domestic virtues, and, though he had no wife or family, practised what he preached. He was an excellent shot, and had been accustomed to ride to hounds, until his bishop remonstrated, upon which he good-humouredly desisted. He was, finally, a fair musician; and had been known, when the damp little organ in his church refused to stop ciphering, to interrupt his reading to address his female organist in a perfectly natural and unabashed voice to try pushing in the stopped diapason. In appearance he was rather like an actor, and also rather like an American.

"This is most kind of you," he said. "Good morning, Miss Tenterden. You have taken me at my word, I see."

"Miss Brent couldn't come," she said; "she promised to do something for Father Denny. And I suddenly felt I had to come. You don't mind?"

"I am simply delighted."

Marion had no precise or formulated object in coming up this morning, beyond a general desire for a very vague kind of reassurance about things as a whole; and it occurred to her, from her memories of the Rector's visit, that perhaps he might supply it. An indefinable sense of isolation was beginning to creep over her: she felt as a child feels when twilight comes on and finds him alone in a distant part of a big garden. For she was beginning to be aware that the step she contemplated meant the severing of a good many acquaintanceships and associations, and that there was not at present secured to her any great number of

new ones to take their place. A Catholic can never be quite lonely: at any rate there is always the local priest when needs become desperate; there is always that Presence in Catholic churches which is the very heart of that religion. And now the girl was beginning to understand that these things were receding from her, and that in a few months she would have no claim at all upon them. Her terrors of this morning had brought these sensations to a point.

But she tried to observe with intelligent interest the details that the Rector pointed out to her, as soon as they had crossed the garden and entered the churchyard.

"That is called the *parvice*, I believe," he said, indicating the little room, with a window, built over the big porch. "They are not very common. It is supposed that they were used perhaps as studies, or places where books were kept: perhaps even a sacristan or a priest might sleep there. But I don't know much about it. I don't think any one does."

"Ah! I don't know either," said Marion; "but I can't imagine one of our present-day priests consenting to sleep there."

He glanced at her with kindly humour.

"And I am quite sure that none of our Rectors would," he said. "You see the niche below the window. That is supposed to have held an image of St. Giles, the patron-saint. I can't think why they pulled him down. He can't have done much harm to any one. And there you see the broken holy-water stoup. That's another instance of our stupidity. It seems to me that the idea of holy water is a very beautiful

and suggestive one: though I suppose you and I wouldn't agree as to details in that matter."

"Oh! I don't know," said Marion. "I daresay we should."

He unlocked the gates of the porch, and they went in.

"I'm sorry to have to keep it locked," he said, "but you see our people don't have the same reverence as yours. I found a party of haymakers here, one day, eating their dinners in the chancel, and one of them was in the pulpit — imitating me, I suppose. They were not my own parishioners."

"How disgusting!" said Marion.

"Oh! well: our country people are very like children. One mustn't be hard on them. But I thought it mustn't happen again."

In the same genial and tolerant manner he went on to comment on all the other things that he showed her; on the traces of an old "Doom" painted in distemper over the chancel arch; on the blocked up door that once had led to the rood loft; on the vast Elizabethan tomb that occupied the end of the south aisle; on the fragments of old glass, leaded together indiscriminately in one of the nave-windows.

"You know," he said, "I do honestly feel a terrible ruffian when I minister here. I'm neither a theologian nor a historian; but I've got common sense, I hope: and it's very plain indeed to me that this church wasn't built for the kind of worship that I conduct here. That 'Doom,' you know: of course it's very naïve and simple: but I'm afraid it doesn't represent the kind

of thing which, personally, I believe. Then those empty niches: artistically, of course, I should be delighted if they could have saints in them; I cannot conceive how they could possibly injure anybody's religion: but then, you know, if they were there, I am afraid I shouldn't think about them quite as you do. You'll think me a dreadful Modernist, I'm afraid. And I suppose that's really what I've always been, though I never knew till lately that it had such a fine name. Like the *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, isn't it? — the man who had always talked prose without knowing it."

Marion said nothing. He glanced at her again.

"However, I've talked too much about myself."

"No: do go on, Mr. Cholmondeley."

He laughed quietly.

"Come and look at this brass," he said. "One of your old priests, you know."

III

"Mr. Cholmondeley," said the girl, as they came out again and stood in the sunshine, "have you ever heard of a Roman Catholic becoming a Protestant?"

"Oh, yes," he said. "My neighbour in the next parish was once one of your priests, I am sorry to say."

"Sorry? Why? And why did I never know that?"

"I'm sorry," said the Rector, "because I don't think it was a very worthy cause that brought him over. He married within a month, you know."

Marion's heart stood still for a moment.

"You think that unworthy?" she said in a low voice.

"Why: surely. He was bound by vows, wasn't he?"

"Yes: of course. But suppose he really changed his mind, too?"

"Well, let us hope that he really did," said the Rector; "and that he was uninfluenced by any consideration except a desire for truth. That is more charitable, certainly. (Let me put up that parasol for you, Miss Tenterden.)"

"But don't you think, perhaps," said Marion, as they walked slowly down the shaded path, "that it really may have been genuine — I mean that his falling in love may have been not exactly the direct cause of his leaving the Church, but the occasion of his looking into his religion again to see if he honestly believed it; and then that he found he didn't."

The Rector chuckled audibly.

"Miss Tenterden; either you're the most broad-minded and charitable Catholic I've ever heard of, or else you're the most sarcastic."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, it's rather odd, isn't it, that I should be attacking one of your priests for joining my own Church, and that you should be defending him?"

Marion stopped a moment under a great chestnut tree. Then she laughed, a little nervously.

"I suppose it is," she said. "But I like to be fair."

"You are more than fair: you are kind," he said.

"But I do honestly think that it may have been that," she said. "I have heard of another case like it, though not of a priest. Imagine that all consolation in religion absolutely went, so that the whole thing became unreal. Well, I suppose that for a time he would think it his duty to go on and persevere. And then there would suddenly come this — this emotion;

and that would wake him up, and he'd begin to ask himself whether he really believed anything at all. Well, suppose he found he didn't; or at any rate that he didn't believe everything that, as a Catholic, he was bound to. What is he to do? Is he to say good-bye to all hopes of happiness, just for fear of what people will say?"

"No, not just for fear of that," said the Rector.

"Well, what then?" asked the girl, looking straight at him.

"I think he should be very distrustful, at any rate, of his conclusions, if self-interest was so wrapped up in them. But I don't profess to be a psychologist," he added, smiling.

"Yes: I quite agree that he should move very slowly," said Marion; "but if he did; and if he really found that he hadn't enough belief left, you wouldn't blame him then, would you?"

"Miss Tenterden; I'm not a controversialist. I hate controversy and taking sides; and I dislike changing sides, even more. I'm a man of peace. I think controversy is feverish and unsettling. I prefer just to try to do my duty, and to trust to God to forgive me my omissions. I hate the denominational spirit."

Marion again looked at him.

"Ah! An old man whom I respect very much was saying the very same thing to me the other day. He told me to try to be broad-minded."

The Rector smiled.

"I don't think he can have known you very well," he said, "if he thought it necessary to say that."

Marion flushed a little.

"Why do you say that?"

"I think you one of the most broad-minded people I have ever met. Think how you've been defending a man whom you would call an apostate. Come, Miss Tenterden; you don't really believe all you've been saying? It was very skilful, I allow. I shall begin to think you've got designs on my own conversion."

"I don't think you ought to say that to me," said the girl a little sharply.

IV

Maggie came out of the churchyard gate, after her labours in the sacristy, just as Marion came down the little village street. Maggie was a little dusty and hot, and very strenuous and fervent. Manual labour in sacred places was to her as is the call of a trumpet to an old war-horse. Every fibre in her thrilled with energy.

"Well, have you seen him?" she asked. "Did he take you round?"

Marion nodded: she too was a little hot, and looked troubled.

"What's the matter, my dearest?" said the elder woman, following her through the cool little hall into the yet cooler parlour. "Are you tired?"

"Just a little," said the girl as she sat down and stretched her hands over the cool arm-bosses of the old Cromwell chair.

"It's been dreadfully hot. You must have a long rest after lunch. Rhadamanthus has been very cross too," pursued Maggie: "I left him in the shade, and the sun crept round, and even when I was in church I heard him saying the most dreadful things all across the garden, till I remembered and called out to Jenny

over the wall to take him in. I hardly like to go and see him, now, he'll be so angry with me. I certainly ought to have remembered about the sun; only I'm so stupid about those things, and only think about myself and my own comforts." (Marion's lips flickered into a smile.) "Yes: I know I do: but I really am going to make some new resolutions and try to think a little about other people as well. And here have I been letting you go up in that hot sun all alone, when really I might have come with you quite well, if I'd only got up early this morning, as I meant to, and done all my cleaning then; only I'm so dreadfully idle and self-indulgent. Yes: put up your feet, my dear. There! sit still, and I'll move the chair. . . . That's better. And did you have a good talk to Mr. Cholmondeley?"

"Yes: we talked."

"I must go up myself, now that we've broken the ice on both sides. Talking of ice, there's another thing I've forgotten, and that is to order the ice from the fishmonger's. Never mind, I'll drive in this afternoon and fetch it myself, and we'll have it by dinner-time, anyhow. And he showed you all the church? I hope you told him what you thought about it all, and how it once belonged to us — oh! I forgot, he acknowledged that himself; though I don't know that it makes it much better that he should enjoy all that stolen property with his eyes open instead of shut. Really it makes it all the worse, I think, instead of better. I shall point that out to him, when I go up. Did he show you his dogs?"

"No, we just saw the church: and we talked."

"Of course if he was a real priest it would be dread-

ful for him to keep dogs — at least that sort of dog — bull-terriers, aren't they? I wouldn't mind if they were sheep-dogs or spaniels, or something like that. But bull-terriers! I really don't think it's quite nice. However, he's not a real priest at all, poor man, so I daresay it doesn't matter so much. But I can't imagine Father Denny keeping bull-terriers. And you had a nice talk, dearest? And you liked him? Perhaps you'll come up with me, when I go up. Will you? "

"No," said Marion slowly. "I don't think I will. I don't think I like Mr. Cholmondeley as much as I thought I did."

CHAPTER VIII

I

"My dearest," said Maggie, a week later, coming into the music-room where the girl sat playing, after lunch, "I've got a confession to make."

Marion smiled.

"Well?" she said.

"I've just had a telegram from Sir John, saying he'll be here at four. Yes: I wrote to him, myself. I saw you were fretting. This is just a small present from me to you —— Why! what's the matter?"

It was an instant before Marion could speak: the little ripple of chords had ceased suddenly: and she had gone white.

"Ah!" she said. "You think so too, do you?"

"My darling! What do you mean?"

"I told you I was nervous . . . and you agree with me. You think . . . you think my voice has gone."

Maggie dropped a rosary with a crash on to the boards, as she threw herself forward on her knees, clasping the girl round the waist.

"My darling! What a brute beast I am! No! No! No! A thousand times! I think nothing of the sort! Nothing of the sort! Don't you understand? It's because I'm absolutely certain that you're fretting about nothing, that I've sent for him. Oh! my dear! Don't you see?"

"But ——"

"My dearest, do you really think I could be such

a pig as to come and announce to you coolly that I've sent for Sir John to come and . . . and break it to you that you've lost your voice? Do you think I shouldn't be down on my knees, if I thought that — to pray . . . and pray that God could comfort us both, and help us to bear it? Why, my dear!"

Maggie's face disappeared into the girl's lap. When she raised it again her eyes were bright with tears and her glasses were askew.

"What a selfish, thoughtless beast I am not to have thought that perhaps you might think that. My dearest! Forgive me! And give me a kiss to tell me so."

It was a good five minutes before the tragic group was broken up, and Maggie found herself, still a little dazed, watching Marion standing on the hearth-rug, and making little gestures as she talked. Her face was still flushed with the reaction from her misery; and her voice was a little hoarser than usual.

"Maggie! It's simply heavenly of you to have thought of it. I simply couldn't send again for him: and I daren't even go up and see him. But I have been fretting, horribly. And yet I know it's nonsense — sheer nonsense! How in the world could a little operation like the one I had possibly make any difference? And I've said that over and over again to myself: but you know how ridiculous one is when one wakes early; and how everything is unreal and exaggerated."

"Oh, my dear! Don't I know?" murmured Maggie ecstatically.

"You see it's the . . . the one single thing in my life now; and — no: of course I don't mean that ex-

actly. But — but, oh! you understand, don't you?"

A comforting cooing came from the chair where Maggie sat, regarding her friend, with her head a little on one side. Marion's face was bright enough now.

"But I did want somebody, with authority, to tell me I was a little fool, and that this hoarseness is only inevitable, so soon after the operation. Why, of course it is — I know that really, well enough. My poor throat! Oh! Oh! Maggie, you darling!"

Again the group re-formed, with the figures reversed.

II

At a quarter past four, the clouds broke overhead, and drove Marion indoors from the garden, where she had been pretending to read a book. She was just a little pale again, too, with excitement, as she came into the parlour and beheld her faithful Maggie still glued to the window to watch for the coming of the surgeon's car.

"No sign?" she said.

"My dearest! How you startled me!" said Maggie, turning round. "Why, it's raining! You've got drops all over you!"

"It's raining your side of the house, too, you know!" observed Marion.

"Why; so it is: and I never noticed it. I remember trying to rub away the drops, too, on the wrong side of the glass. But I never thought it was raining. It didn't occur to me, somehow. Why, of course it'll be that that has detained him! I daresay his chauffeur is afraid of skidding. My dear! you're not nervous now, are you?"

"No! No! No!" cried the girl emphatically. "At

least, of course, I am, on the top. But not down below. Maggie! you do think my hoarseness is going, don't you? I'm sure if he'd only allow me to do my exercises again I should be all right. Don't you?"

"My dear! how should I know? But of course you're better. Jenny was saying so only yesterday. Now, do go into the garden again — Oh! no, of course you can't: it's raining."

"Maggie: you'll explain our plan to him, won't you? He is to examine my throat upstairs in my room: and he's not to say one single word. He's got a face like cast steel: so I shan't be able to tell anything from that. Then I'll go straight down to the music-room, and get my exercises ready, and wait. Then — you'll be waiting in your room, won't you? — and go straight into mine as soon as you hear me go downstairs. Then you'll come straight down to me, at once: and if I'm allowed to practise again, we'll sing — oh! 'God save the King' straight through. And if I'm not allowed, just yet — and I'm really trying to make up my mind to that — I'll play it instead as . . . as a thanksgiving that I needn't fret any more, anyhow. And then we'll all have tea together: and he shall go back with blessings on his bald head. You'll remember all that, won't you?"

She had her by the shoulders now, and was shaking her so vigorously that Maggie's glasses suddenly fell off.

"Oh! what a rough brute I am!" cried the girl, dropping on her knees to hunt for them.

"Oh, my dear!" murmured Maggie, "I'll remember every word of it. (Thank you, dear.) And I've told Mrs. Grant to have scones for tea, all ready at half-

past four. He's Scotch, you know, and he's sure to like them. And we've got the strawberry jam that Jenny made last year: I found two pots of it, unused. And Jenny's to bring tea in, straight, the very moment I ring: and we'll have it in the music-room. Ah!"

There was the musical cry of a horn further up the village street: and the two, suddenly struck dumb, remained motionless by the little diamond-paned window, now streaming with gusty tears. Outside in the strip of garden that separated the cottage from the road, the tall delphiniums tossed their spires of burning blue, and the privet-hedge beyond shivered under the shock of the wind. As Maggie bent this way and that for a first glimpse, she caught sight for a moment of the rigid profile and the fixed terrified eyes of the girl at her side. She threw her arms round her; and, simultaneously, a long dark blue car, splashed above its wheels, slid over the yellow strip of road, and drew up.

III

"Now: be quiet and wait! be quiet and wait!" murmured the girl as she went, with clenched hands, up the long floor of the music-room.

So far everything had gone according to programme.

She had recovered herself enough to look quite natural once more, by the time that the tall Scotch surgeon — absolutely the supreme throat-man of that period — followed the tremulous Maggie into the dark little parlour.

He was a very lean man, which made his height the more impressive; and he had, as Marion had said, a face that appeared as if cut out of steel, with a high,

bald forehead over it. His eyes were small and keen, with tangled eyebrows; but they could be kind and bracing too. He did none of the things that might have been expected of him: he did not rub his hands together; on the contrary they dangled before him, rather in the manner of a kangaroo's forepaws, until he put one of them forward to be shaken: he did not ask how "we" were: he said "Good afternoon" only, in a perfectly colourless voice.

Then Maggie had burst into explanations.

"This poor girl has been dreadfully foolish and nervous," she said. ("Yes, my dear! I'm going to tell the truth!) She's been fretting dreadfully, and not resting at all well, as you told her she must. She's been fancying the most ridiculous things about her voice being gone, and all that. So I was determined she should have her mind put at rest, once and for all. And, please, Sir John, will you kindly not say anything at all to her, after you've examined her throat upstairs, but say it all to me instead, when I come in. Miss Tenterden will go straight downstairs as soon as you've finished, and wait for us in the music-room: and ——"

"Shall we go upstairs at once, Sir John?" Marion had said at that point.

She simply could not bear any more explanations just then. He had bowed, without speaking.

Then, upstairs, after she had once more described the little plan which the two had formed, the extremely unpleasant process had been gone through, lasting perhaps twenty minutes. He had put round his head a sort of circlet, bound in leather, with a highly concentrated and shaded electric lamp in the centre of his

forehead, and a shade so fixed to it as to keep the light out of his own eyes. Then the usual things were done: instruments had been inserted; and on one of them was a tiny mirror. She had been desired to pronounce certain vowels, after a deep breath: and those little bits of ritual were repeated three or four times over. No change whatever had passed over the surgeon's face. Then, still staring down her throat, he had asked her to attempt to sing very softly three or four notes; and had stopped her with a gesture. Then, almost roughly, he had laid his hands on her cheeks and had looked down her throat again. Then he had paused.

Marion lifted her eyebrows. She could not speak.

"Thank you, Miss Tenterden," he had said.

For a moment she thought he was going to say more, and her hands made a swift little gesture upwards from her sides: but she had forced them down again, and wheeling, she had gone straight out of the room, hearing a loud crack from the door of the room where obviously Maggie had been listening throughout. As she went downstairs, with a very strange feeling in her knees, she had heard the unmistakable crash of a pebble-rosary upon bare boards. Plainly Maggie had been reciting her beads throughout the interview. Marion wondered which of the Mysteries had been contemplated. . . . And now, here she was, breathing swiftly, still with that weak feeling in the knees, going up and down the music-room.

Her mind was in such conflict that it produced the effect of a dual personality. On one side every fear and tremor that she had ever had during these last weeks seemed, like an undisciplined mob, to be besieging and

assaulting her in overwhelming numbers. There was no arguing with them one by one: as soon as one was repulsed another rushed up, roaring; and, for those few minutes, every foreboding on any subject other than that of her voice seemed incredibly insignificant: her religious fears, her misery at the thought of having to break Maggie's heart — (for she had come to see that little less than this was probable) — even that wild doubt of Max that had come to her once, and that she had long ago ceased even to think of — these terrors were incapable of approaching her now. Every pang and anguish that she could feel centred round one single thing — the verdict that she was to hear in a minute or two — the verdict that even now was being pronounced upstairs.

Her defending side was composed of reason and common sense. Sir John had told her expressly, long ago, that there was no kind of cause to fear that the little operation could have any but a temporary effect; and she desperately strove to dash this memory into the face of her terrors. But they answered her so vividly and connectedly that it was as if voices disputed aloud on the stage of her consciousness.

"He told me so," she said. (She had caught up the kitten as she came downstairs, and was now stroking him violently. Her mascot seemed a comfort.)

Yes: but he's not infallible, came the swift response.

"But he knows far more than I do."

But still — he's not infallible.

"But it would be extraordinary and exceptional." (She had to put Maximilian down; he had resented her mechanical and untender caresses.)

Would that make it any easier to bear? — To think

that a thousand others have had the operation, with no ill-effects?

"But the whole thing would be absurd! That a *prima donna* should leap into success in January, and lose her voice in the following August, is unthinkable."

Only because it hasn't yet happened. It may be quite thinkable to-morrow — even in five minutes.

"But it is impossible that God could treat me so hardly."

Then came the most torturing answer of all.

Have you treated Him so gratefully?

That indeed was a poisonous thought, which had come to her once or twice before, but which she had managed to dismiss as superstitious and horrible, and totally unworthy of her new Gospel of Broad-mindedness.

"But how could God stoop to so fiendish a revenge?"

Then the old Catholic training came back.

Revenge! How dare you call it that? Whom the Lord loves He chastises.

"Ah! God: let me alone! I don't want to be loved like that."

But perhaps He is greater than you. Perhaps He loves so much that He is willing even to torment you.

"But the thing is nonsense, anyhow. It isn't going to happen. I've told you so, twenty times: so we need not enter into a theological discussion. You know perfectly well that it's all right; that this hoarseness is far less than a week ago. Certainly you did not sing those three or four notes very well upstairs just now: but that's quite natural. Of course your throat isn't actually well yet: no one could expect that. But it's

only a question of a week or two — or even a month or two. Anyhow the worst can't happen, because it's impossible. And impossible things do not happen. . . . Maximilian! come here at once."

Then she tried to switch off her fears by turning them merely on to the point as to whether she would be allowed to begin her exercises again at once, and to cheat herself into believing that that was the only real point at issue at all — since the greater terror was a ludicrous impossibility.

In the strength of the attempt, which she knew was a false one, she went across to the big chest and opened it. (Maximilian had not responded: he was eyeing her from beyond the stove.)

There lay the books within. *Lohengrin* was at the top. She had been playing it this morning, before she knew that Sir John was coming; and a pang of actual physical pain touched her heart as with a finger tipped in acid. That was absurd. . . . Of course she would sing it again. Next January. So she would lift it out now, and put it on the end of the piano.

And there were the exercise books. Yes: those were the ones she wanted. Just two would be enough. Of course it would be very annoying if she really wasn't allowed to begin her exercises again just yet, and had to put those books back. However, she would put them on the top of *Lohengrin*. . . .

As she did so she suddenly heard rapid steps coming down the stairs; and her wrists grew nerveless and her heart sick.

Ah! but Maggie was running: and she wouldn't run

with bad news of course. . . . Her teeth closed on her lower lip, and she drew a long trembling breath through the corners of her mouth.

Ah! there was a crash. Had Maggie slipped on that bottom step again?

The rest followed in a flash.

There was a fumbling at the door-handle. Then it flew open; and as the exercise books fell with a sudden bang to the floor, and Maximilian skipped into the air, Maggie, her face distorted with crying, burst into the room, and, with a cry like a wounded beast, rushed across the floor and seized her, sobbing.

"Ah-h-h!" cried Maggie.

PART III

CHAPTER I

I

It was time for night prayers; but the two women still sat motionless. Maggie held Marion's hand in hers. They had talked, or rather Maggie had, for the most part, sentence by sentence, slowly — with long pauses — ever since Sir John had gone, three hours ago: they had supped, after a fashion, still in the music-room; the darkness was still lit only by the two candles that had lighted the little supper-table, now guttering down to their last inch. Maggie had had fits of crying, and was now quieter: Marion had been quiet throughout. Her lips had been so dry that she could scarcely speak. Maximilian had been shut up in the kitchen: Maggie had remembered to see to that.

There was no hope at all that her voice would come back, at least such a voice as she had had a month ago. Sir John had been kind and sympathetic, and had explained, in as simple language as he could, exactly what was wrong: but neither of the two could have given an intelligible account of it. There had been a contraction in the muscles of the throat and larynx, and it was of such a nature that although hoarseness of speech would no doubt almost entirely disappear, the singing voice could never return. That was the real point: Marion's operatic career was at an end. That was the central point round which her attention swung, now wandering off to this or that ef-

fect, but always brought back as by a tug on a string. She strove to realise it by dwelling on details — that piano-score of *Lohengrin* for instance that still lay on the end of the piano, and could go back into the music-chest forever. That dress laid away upstairs — (she had brought down with her to Standing, in a kind of childish pleasure, the costume of the First Act) — would not be worn again: these exercise books that still lay tumbled on the floor would never be needed again. Yet even these details continued to evade her: the fact remained. With regard to the great correlative facts — the thoughts of Max and of religion and of her future — she could not discover her own attitude; she did not know what she would do; although in the one single instance an hour ago, when she had suddenly broken down and dashed herself face downwards, away from Maggie, on to the arm of her chair, it had been with a passionate longing for Max to be there and to reassure and comfort her. But she did not know what she herself would do. There seemed nothing: he must now do it all. The fact remained that she would never sing Elsa again, never feel her soul beating up on the wings of sound, never again come forward to meet the storm and thunder of applause. . . . She would never sing Elsa again. . . . She would never sing Elsa again. Her eyes wandered and dwelt among the dark spaces of the high roof: and her dry lips lay apart. She would never sing Elsa again.

Maggie's temperament, however, had already begun to recover itself, though as yet she showed no outward signs of it, and still sat desolate by her friend's side. Her tears had been passionate, while Marion had only cried very slowly and very little; the pain had been

sharper, while Marion's was rather that of a bruise: and now already there were beginning to come in the elder woman's mind flashes and sparks of thought and hope for the future: her mental tissue, so to speak, cut more cleanly, was healing more swiftly. She had said a little about the Will of God: Marion had not moved or answered; she had said that they would both go abroad for a long time: Marion had not moved or answered: she had wondered aloud whether the ordinary stage might not be a possibility: Marion had looked at her at that, but had shaken her head, as if she had already considered this.

"But, my dearest, why not? You can act beautifully, you know. Every one says ——"

"No."

Maggie had fallen to patting her friend's hand again.

Presently she began once more.

"The thing to do, my darling, is just to resign ourselves to God's Holy and Adorable Will."

"A blessing in disguise, no doubt!" Marion whispered; and the bitterness in her voice was appalling.

"Yes, my dearest," flowed on Maggie serenely, "that is the way to look at it. I am so glad you can think of it as that, already. We shall be very happy together, we two. We'll go abroad together and see things for a bit, if Sir John will give you leave to travel — to Switzerland, perhaps, and then down to the Italian lakes, later: and then back here, or to London, if you prefer it, for the winter. And then we must set ourselves to find out what it is that our Divine Lord wants of us: He'll find something for us to do, depend upon it. Father George preached a beautiful sermon on that very point, on the Sunday

before we left London. I wish you'd been there. But never mind, I'm sure that all will be for the best. Good gracious me! It's a quarter to ten, and we've forgotten all about night prayers. . . . Why, where are you going, my darling? Are you going to ring?"

"I think I shall go to my room," said Marion, very upright and pale, but speaking without emotion, "and leave you to have night prayers. I don't think ——" her voice suddenly ceased and her lips closed.

"You don't think what, my pet?"

"I don't think God wants me," said Marion.

Then a rather dreadful little thing happened. The door, it seemed, was not properly shut; and as the girl spoke, it moved a little. Then a small black and furry form came round it on tip-toe, exactly as it had entered the dressing-room at Covent Garden a few months ago; only it was now a little cat.

Maggie heard a swift-drawn breath of pain, and sprang up. Then she was out of the room with the little cat clawing, in furious anger, at her ear and neck.

II

When Maggie came back from mass next morning, after a singularly miserable night, she found Marion already down and dressed. She began expostulations.

"I don't think it's much good bothering about my health any more," said Marion detachedly, "at any rate, I'm not going to. And I've ordered the pony-cart in twenty minutes. I must go up by the nine-thirty: there are a hundred things to do."

Maggie burst into remonstrances.

"Yes, I know," said Marion; "but I'm going, for all that. I've sent a wire to Mr. Harrison. I must

tell him at once: it's the only thing to do. I shall be back by the six-fifty. Would you mind sending to meet me? No: I must go alone. You mustn't come, please. No; not even to the station."

It was a bewildering day that Maggie passed, all alone, except for her rapid excursions into the kitchen and the sacristy. She spent not only her "hour," but considerably more, in church, though never longer than ten or twelve minutes at a time; since she was thoroughly restless, and remembered continually small things that needed, she thought, to be done elsewhere. For instance, she remembered Rhadamanthus too much altogether for his peace of mind, and was constantly shifting him, first out of doors because he liked the air, then indoors because she thought it might rain, then out of doors again because the air was good for him anyhow; and finally under a little tool-shed, where she forgot him for three hours. In a similar spirit she ordered and counterordered things in the kitchen till Mrs. Grant simply ceased to answer her. Finally, by the time that Marion was expected home again, she had informed Father Denny, Mrs. Grant, Jenny, Mr. Cholmondeley and the grocer's boy, binding each under the strictest confidence, that Marion had lost her voice, and had gone to London to see about it.

Yet beneath all this turmoil of activity she had a bitterly sore heart. It had been like a blow in the face to her when Marion had said last night that God no longer seemed to want her; and, though she had covered it up with a multitude of words, thereby postponing night prayers for another twenty minutes, she had not in the least forgotten what had been said; and

it is probably true to say that this gave her considerably more pain than even the tragedy of yesterday. Honestly, exterior things did not affect her very long or very deeply; she had a remarkably detached spirit in such matters: but interior things hurt her all the more. If Marion had been dying, Maggie certainly would have cried abundantly by the bedside, but if the girl's "dispositions," as she would have said, had been good, by the time of the funeral she would have been almost triumphantly content. Such was her nature.

She was once more at the window as the pony-cart drew up; and at the gate before Marion was out.

"Well, my dearest?" she said.

"Well?" said Marion.

She followed her into the parlour. The girl stood motionless on the hearth, still with that pale, steady look she had had this morning. Maximilian came up and rubbed against her, purring: but she paid no attention.

"Well?" said Maggie again.

Marion turned and looked at her.

"I don't think there's much to say," she said. "I did all that I meant to do. I saw Mr. Harrison and told him. I suppose he was very kind. Certainly he meant to be. I saw von Günther." (Her voice shook for an instant, but steadied again.) "He cried. So did his wife. I even saw Sir John again, to make absolutely certain. I saw one or two other people, too. They were all very . . . very kind."

Maggie advanced imploring hands.

"Ah! don't touch me!" said Marion. Then she went straight to the door and opened it; but turned before she went out. "By the way," she said, "do you think Maximilian could go away for a bit? I . . . I can't quite bear him."

At supper she was very silent; and Maggie felt very nearly desperate. All day long she had waited for this return, promising herself that a good talk would make things better: she had ordered particular dishes, and Marion scarcely tasted them. She had covered the piano with an enormous baize cloth, thinking that somehow this would make things easier, and had pushed the music-chest further into the corner: and Marion seemed to notice nothing. She made remarks about Rhadamanthus, and the sacristy, and gave a full weather report of the entire day from the moment Marion had left to the moment she returned; and the girl scarcely answered. Yet, exteriorly, the scene was one of extreme peace and sweetness. It was dark by the time that supper was finished; only the uncurtained windows still showed liquid depths of luminous sky, blue, up in the zenith, fading to green westwards; and against this sky the apse of the church and the glowing spot seen through the tall lancet of glass. Within, too, the room was peaceful and sweet. Maggie had picked roses to-day, in intervals, and had filled bowl after bowl of glass and silver. A silver bowl, crammed with tea-roses was in the middle of the supper-table between the candles; and another on the end of the piano; and a row of slender glass vases on the mantelpiece held each a scarlet flower. The whole room, with its high pointed

roof, its dark beams, its clean whitewash, its charming furniture, and, above all, its sense of space, seemed the very home of serenity.

When Jenny had brought in the coffee and gone out again, Maggie once more turned to her friend, to try again: but Marion was already looking at her, steadily and observantly, as if to appraise and analyse her capacities. The girl's eyes were reflective, and, it seemed to Maggie, a little hard.

"My darling — why do you look ——"

Marion stood up.

"Yes," she said, as if to herself, "it had better be done with. Sit in that chair, Maggie dear; and let me talk to you. I've got something to say."

III

For the first moment, while she did not speak, leaning forward she took one of Maggie's hands in hers, as if to caress it. Then, as if remembering herself, she dropped it almost abruptly, and sat back.

"But ——" expostulated Maggie, who liked the holding of hands.

"I must tell you first," said Marion, even a little harshly. "No, my dear, I mean it." (She paused.) "Maggie," she said, "I am going to hurt you horribly."

She saw that the shock, which she intended to give, had reached the other. Maggie blinked for an instant, as if flinching from a blow.

"I don't understand, dearest," she began; and her voice trembled a little.

Marion stood up and passed behind the chair she had risen from.

"Please sit still, Maggie dear. I . . . I don't want to see your face. And please say nothing till I've done. Yes: I really mean that."

Then, in her low hoarse voice, walking rapidly and uneasily up and down the room behind her friend's chair; she began her tale.

"I must begin a long way back: I really don't quite know when. I suppose it began at Munich. It began with my religion. I don't know how it was; but everything seemed to go out of it — everything that was the least consolation or happiness. I did all the regular things, I suppose: I persevered and so on. But it was not the slightest good. The thing was just dead ——"

"But, my dear ——" began Maggie, completely bewildered.

"Maggie: please don't interrupt till I've done. I really mean it. You can say what you will, afterwards." . . . (She resumed her pacing.)

"Well: that went on and on. In fact it's going on still: and I began to feel desperate. It's quite true I got interested in other things — my music for instance. And I can't see that I was wrong. If Almighty God gives one anything, I imagine He wants one to use it: and to enjoy it, too. I shall always think that. He can't be meaner than . . . than you would be; or even I. So I got interested; and I began not to mind so much that my religion didn't mean anything. And then — then the point came."

She stopped at the end of the room nearest the piano. Then she suddenly wheeled round abruptly.

"Well: I may as well say it straight out. I . . . I feel in love. (No: don't interrupt; I can't bear it. I must finish.) I suppose you can guess who with.

Well, anyhow it was Max Merival. And he with me. I can't say exactly when it began. Honestly I don't know. I suppose it must have been in Scotland. If it was, I didn't know it at the time, anyhow."

(Her voice grew more and more abrupt. It was like the firing of little sentences, rather than a continuous narrative.)

"He proposed to me — oh! months ago. At the end of last year: I wouldn't listen to him at the time. At least I told him I would give him no answer till I had sung at Covent Garden: and that if I failed, I would never see him again. I meant every word of it. I don't know why I said it. I suppose it was that I thought I must have something to offer him. Well: he came round to my dressing-room after the first performance. I accepted him. . . .

"Then, you remember you made me promise I wouldn't see him alone without your leave. Well: I haven't kept that promise. But I have tried. I haven't failed very often. I nearly told you, again and again: but each time I thought I wouldn't fail again: and I didn't want to upset you. I just say that to show that I wasn't exactly a deliberate liar. My . . . my intentions were good, in the main.

"Now we're coming to the point."

The hoarse voice failed for a few seconds. The girl took a turn and a half before she spoke again. She continued, with her back to Maggie, speaking very rapidly.

"The chief difficulty is his people. They would think such a marriage terribly below him. They've . . . they've got an exaggerated idea of themselves. So Max says. Yet he's dependent on them absolutely.

In a month or so, perhaps sooner — he's going to watch his opportunity — he's going to ask his father to put him into some profession; and then, as soon as he's independent I'm going to marry him. That's absolutely settled. I saw him again to-day.

"That's absolutely settled," she repeated. "But . . . but this is the thing that you'll mind most. I'm not going to ask him to make the necessary promises. I'm not going to be married in a Catholic church. (Maggie: for God's sake don't move or speak till I've done.) Yes: I know precisely what I'm doing. I've consulted two priests. They've warned me fairly. I know that in the eyes of the Catholic Church I shan't be married at all. I can't help it. God has not been fair to me. He took away all joy in my religion years ago. And now He's taken away everything else. But He shan't take away Max."

IV

A dead silence followed her last defiant sentence. There was no fire on the hearth; there was no breeze outside: there was no sound of wheels: and the servants were quiet in the kitchen. Then there sounded a little rustle from the chair where Maggie had sat motionless: and Marion wheeled swiftly round. The next moment she was kneeling on the ground; her head was buried in her friend's lap; and a hand was gently stroking her hair.

"Oh! my dearest," murmured a broken voice over her head, "why didn't you tell me before? Why didn't you tell me before? But I suppose you couldn't. And I suppose Mr. Merival told you not to. But if only you had! — Well: of course it can't really happen. A

thing like that couldn't happen to my dear girl. But how dreadful that it should have come even to thinking of it. I understand so well: I really do: though I'm a stupid old woman: but I wasn't always. I mean I wasn't always an old woman; not that I wasn't always stupid. And it must have been my fault that you couldn't tell me: I was too selfish and . . . and thinking about myself ——"

The girl's face looked up in agony.

"Maggie! Maggie!"

A hand pressed down her head again.

"There! there! just have your cry out. It'll do you good, my dearest: and you'll feel better. Well, that's all I can say just now about it. I must think what must be done. And you must tell me more about it, by and by; and why you can't ask Mr. Merival to be married properly and make the promises. My darling: I do know what you must have been going through; and now on the top of all the rest has come this other thing. Well, you know, our Divine Lord wouldn't have sent you all this ——"

"You don't understand," murmured the girl.

"No, my darling, I expect I don't, really. But I'm trying to. Indeed I'm trying to; and I shall, a lot better, presently, when I've had a good think over it all, and said my prayers. We'll have night prayers earlier to-night — Mrs. Grant won't mind, I'm sure, for once. And you'll stay for them to-night, won't you? And perhaps we'll have a little talk again, afterwards; and perhaps we won't. There! my dearest: don't cry so much."

Maggie leaned over, with the tears streaming down her own cheeks, and kissed the back of the girl's neck.

CHAPTER II

I

Nature is very merciful so soon as a certain pitch of agony, whether physical or mental, has once been reached, and pours upon the tortured nerves a narcotic which, while not destroying the consciousness of pain, yet renders it bearable.

So soon as their last talk that night was over — a talk in which Marion did at last manage to make clear, at any rate, the reasons for which she felt herself compelled to act as she intended to act, an extreme weariness came upon her, and she went up to bed half blind with sleep. No sooner, too, was she in bed, than that sleep reasserted itself irresistibly, and she neither dreamed nor moved till morning.

The first thing of which she was aware in the morning, as her consciousness slowly rose out of those bottomless gulfs of darkness in which she had lain and rested all night, was the figure of Maggie herself putting down the breakfast tray by her bedside.

"There, my dearest girl," she said in a voice that showed no emotion beyond that of ordinary cheerfulness, "I've brought up your breakfast. It's after half-past eight. And you must try to get a sleep again afterwards. And Maximilian's gone on a visit to a farm. He went early this morning."

Marion felt a light kiss on her forehead: and the door shut.

She did indeed feel extraordinarily tired still; but

the sense of nervous tension that had been so keen last night, culminating in the almost unbearable effort she had made to be frank with Maggie at last — this was gone; and languor had succeeded. She dozed off again almost immediately: and woke ten minutes later, hearing the sound of wheels outside her window. Then she roused herself to eat.

She had only taken the resolution to tell Maggie everything, as she came down in the train last evening; driven to it by the sense of strain and the emotions through which she had passed. First she had gone to Mr. Harrison's house in Hampstead. He had been kind; but he appeared not to understand that it was the fact itself that she could never again sing that caused her such torment, and not the effects resulting from that fact. His effort at condolence centred chiefly round the prospective loss of her income; and so soon as she realised that she sought for no more consolation from him.

Her interview with von Günther affected her very much more. He had broken down and wept, frankly; yet even he, between his tears, appeared to lament the loss that art was suffering, rather than that of which Marion herself was conscious. He remembered himself at the end, and called her his "poor dear child" repeatedly: he had even sought to gather her to his ample breast.

Finally the interview with Max had been the climax, following that with Sir John.

She had called him up on the telephone, begging him to come at once to the house on Campden Hill: and within half an hour he was there, a little pale, and quite bewildered. At first he had seemed incapable of taking

it in: he had said repeatedly that there must be some mistake; he had begged her to consult other medical authorities; finally, so soon as he cried out that the thing was ludicrously impossible, Marion had seen that he understood it was a fact.

He had been marvellously tender after that. He and he alone, it seemed to Marion, understood where the agony lay; and that it was the simple truth that she could never sing again, at any rate as she had sung, could never appear in Opera again, and interpret the parts which she had made so particularly her own, that was stabbing her soul. He and he alone appeared to have even the least conception of what pain she was suffering.

"But, my darling," he had said, "after all it is you yourself that matters. And you are just the same, aren't you? — as you were before. It's all there still: only you . . . you can't express it."

His eyes had dwelt on hers with a very appealing pathos, as if seeking reassurance.

"Why, Max," she said, "of course I am. And that, in one way, is the most dreadful thing of all."

At the end she had utterly broken down, and clung to him as a child to an elder brother, crying her heart out.

"But you understand! Oh! I knew you would, Max: I knew you would!"

Then, on the way home, after he had seen her into the train at Liverpool Street, she had taken her resolution.

A number of only half understood reasons had contributed to it. For, first, she was beginning to realise

now that there remained to her but two persons in the world in whom she could find comfort, and that from one of them she had already forfeited any claim to comfort. Everything else was gone: her art had broken down under her: henceforth she could be receptive only, no longer active; and to an artist who has once tasted the joy of successful activity, receptivity means but little. Her friends were gone; she knew that: for she knew that all whose acquaintance she had made in the last year, with the possible exception of Sir Robert Mainwaring, had admired and loved her only for her art: they had never got beyond that, to herself. There was Norah Merival, for instance: well, in a sense they were friends; they had reached the Christian name stage months ago: yet it did not even occur to her to turn to Norah, or to send her any message: she proposed, only, to write in a day or two from Standing and to relate the heartbreaking news. There were but two people in the world who had penetrated, she believed, beyond her expression to herself, who loved her for what she was, and not merely for what she could do; and of these two, as has been said, one had been grossly deceived as to her true nature. It was intolerable, then, that this should last any longer. She was in desperate straits now: she must face the truth at last: she must know whether or no Maggie could forgive her: she could no longer bear to live, as had been quite tolerable in the midst of distraction and excitement, on what might prove completely false pretences.

II

As she lay in bed this morning she began now to review the scene of last night; and to be amazed, as she

had not been clear-headed enough to be amazed before, at the apparently boundless charity of her friend. She had always thought that the scene of the final revelation would be far more painful, and that the limits of Maggie's often rather vague benevolence would disclose themselves at last. For she had believed, as most persons do when they begin to secede from devotion, that devotional characters do not go deep: she had been at any rate inclined to suspect that Maggie's religion was only a very superior kind of pastime, that she regarded her rosaries and her little books and her "hours" and all the rest, as offering a pleasant and emotional kind of personal occupation; and that beyond them there was not very much except ordinary humanity, and ordinary humanity, as is well known, is a rather touchy and venomous kind of thing when its pride or its personal feelings are injured. She had honestly therefore expected an exceedingly painful scene, with a good deal of anger and righteous bitterness: she had looked for reproaches, or hysterical weeping, or even denunciation; and in place she had met with tears indeed, but tears of real sympathy and love, with caresses, and with self-reproach. It was her first glimpse of this that had broken down her own defiant pose, and sent her suddenly to her knees.

It was a charming little room in which Marion lay and considered these things. It pretended to be nothing other than what it was — a front bedroom on the first floor of an English stone cottage. The walls were distempered with white, except where, on the inner partition wall a black oak beam crossed the space diagonally from roof to floor. The floor, again of oak, was uneven, and as solid as iron; and upon it lay a couple of

squares of cool matting. The furniture was of the simplest possible old mahogany; the bed, also of mahogany, was a cut-down four-poster. The hangings were entirely sprigged chintz: Marion, in a previous month of opulence, had replaced the original rep by these patterns, produced straight from the old blocks of Georgian days; and had caused them to be lined with a peculiar tint of yellow which she loved. A *prie-Dieu* stood against the inner wall, and above it, attached to the beam, hung an ivory crucifix which Maggie had given her. On the table in the centre of the room stood a glass vase filled with roses; and through the open windows the summer breeze flowed in, rustling the ivy, stirring the chintz curtains and filling the room with scented coolness.

Yet it was only to her physical senses that the sweetness of it all appealed: in her heart was that great bitterness of her loss, even increased, as she thought of it, when she remembered how she had lain here at a certain week end two months ago, and regarded her life as it then presented itself. She had sung Isolde on the previous Thursday: she would sing Elsa on the following Tuesday; and her heart had exulted and danced with the flickering sunlight that moved on the floor from the single light-curtained window that looked over the garden. She had pretended even to congratulate herself on getting away from London into this sweet serenity: yet she had known with humorous delight that she enjoyed the serenity only as a child who waits for sheer pleasure of anticipation, before plunging again into a sunlit sea.

And now the serenity mocked her: and anticipation was dead.

III

When she was dressed at last she came very quietly downstairs, half fearing to hear Maggie call to her; but there was no sign of her; and, relieved that the ordeal of another talk was at any rate postponed for the present, she peeped into the garden before going out; and that too was empty; so she went out quickly on tiptoe. She wanted to think a great deal, not indeed as to the substance of what she would say, but as to its presentation. She had been too abrupt last night, she thought: that was why she had such a reaction: she must be as positive to-day, but quieter: she must marshal her reasons more persuasively: she must show that, under the circumstances nothing else could be expected of her.

She had been out about ten minutes when Jenny's rosy face peeped from the kitchen door, and then hastily withdrew: but a minute later out came not merely Jenny's head, but her entire person: and she bore a salver in her hand.

Marion wondered vaguely what the maid was bringing; it might be a telegram from Max; but she remembered to smile encouragingly at Jenny as an acknowledgment that the salver had not been forgotten.

"Please, Miss, Miss Brent left this note for you. I put it on the chest in the ——"

"Left it! What do you mean? — Where is — Give it me."

A sudden unreasoning pang shot through her; she thought for a moment that Maggie had left her, even while she knew that it was impossible. Jenny, slightly alarmed, handed her the salver and she snatched at the note and tore it open.

"My Dearest,

"I don't know if you'll ever forgive me; but I'm going off to London to see Mr. Merival. I telegraphed to him the first thing this morning. Please don't be angry with me: but I felt I must hear from his own lips that he understands what he is asking you to do. I cannot bring myself to believe that he will refuse the promises when he knows what it all means. I dared not tell you what my plan was: because I knew you would forbid me. The pony-cart is just coming round; and I must not write any more if I am to catch the train. My dearest; don't be angry. You know how much I love you.

"Yours,
"M. B."

She read it through twice; and her face was white as she realised all it would mean. It appeared to her certain that Max would think it was at her instigation that Maggie had gone up; and in that moment, all the repressed impatience that she had ever felt towards her friend and her odd unaccountable impulses, surged up like a tide in her heart. It was intolerable that her confidence should be betrayed like this, and her plans interfered with.

"What's the time?" she whispered sharply, twisting her wrist to look at her watch. "Half-past ten. It's too late. No, it isn't. Jenny, send Charlie here at once. I want him to take a telegram. He must go on his bicycle. Fetch him. I'll get a telegraph form."

She rose so swiftly that the little maid shrank aside.

"Go quick," she said; and hurried into the house.

Her hands shook so much that she could scarcely draw out the form from the paper-case in the parlour. Maggie, for once, had remembered to fill the case; and she had done so with such fervour and completeness that everything was wedged together.

Then she wrote, quickly.

"*M. Merival, Cheriton House, Park Lane, London, W.*

"*Refuse — to — see — Maggie.— Important.— Writing.— Tenterden.*"

With this in her hand she hurried out again on to the lawn, in time to see Charlie, with Jenny behind him, emerging from the vegetable patch, and putting on his coat as he came.

"Got your bicycle? That's right. Take this as fast as you can to the telegraph-office. Got sixpence? That's all right. By the way, is the pony-cart back? Who drove it?"

"Please, Miss," said Charlie. "Jim drove it this morning as I had a deal to do in the garden."

"Who's Jim? Oh! it doesn't matter. It's not back yet?"

"No, Miss: I think there was some shopping to do, Miss."

She nodded.

"That's all right. Go as quick as you can, please."

She waited till she heard the gate clash. Then, slowly but still trembling a little, she went back to her chair among the roses, and sat down.

Really this interference was intolerable. She had given in too much to Maggie: that was the truth of the matter. Of course she owed a great deal to her, and

that was the reason of her taking so subordinate a place, and even of confiding in her yesterday; but there was a limit in all things, and that limit had been reached.

She grew angrier and angrier as she sat and brooded; and, once more, all those tiny touches of irritation that she had felt so often for Maggie's vague and helpless ways, surged up and exploded. She had felt them so often, although sometimes a sense of humour had saved her from expressing them strongly even to herself. For instance when Maggie dropped her books two or three times from her lap, when she missed trains, when she addressed Rhadamanthus with a loud aside suddenly, in the midst of an interesting conversation, when she began to hum, like a bee in a bottle, as Marion was playing a soft passage — all these things, so small in themselves, now combined in her mind as one more cause for anger and contempt. And it was this helpless disorderly person who had dared to betray her confidence and interfere on her behalf as if she were a child and could not look after herself. Why, who was Maggie after all? Which, as a matter of fact, had been the more practical and successful in life, Marion who had taken London by storm, who had had her picture in a hundred photograph-shops, who had bowed to roaring audiences in Covent Garden, who had made her way, and, indeed, a small fortune as well — or Maggie, who had done nothing but waste money left her by her parents, who was simply unable to look out a train in *Bradshaw*, who made innumerable rules and never kept them, who fussed amiably over servant-maids who probably laughed at her behind her back, who dressed like a governess, who wrote an illegible handwriting — who, in short, muddled every relation of life and every duty

with which she was faced? And it was this incompetent, vague, feeble creature who had dared to interfere.

Presently, again, she began to calculate once more whether the telegram would really reach Max in time: it would be a few minutes one side or the other. In any case her having sent it would be a kind of guarantee that Maggie had not gone to see him with her connivance. But she grew a little nervous; and stood up again after a few minutes to go to the side gate and see whether Charlie were coming back; and, as she did so, heard steps running down the street of the little hamlet, towards the cottage. Vaguely she thought that it was like Charlie's rustic running: but, obviously it could not be, as he was gone on a bicycle. As she began to move towards the gate — a pair of double doors that gave entrance straight into the garden from the road — they suddenly shook; then opened, and Charlie burst in.

His face was working oddly, as if with mingled grief and pleasure and excitement; and she caught her lip in her teeth, as her manner was. Had he met a mad bull? Was the telegraph-office wrecked? Vague possibilities passed through her mind.

"Please, Miss," panted Charlie, "there's been an accident ——"

"*What?*"

"Miss Brent, Miss. She was run into this morning, in the pony-cart. Taken to the doctor's house, Miss. Met his boy as I was coming down the village. Says she's dying, Miss."

IV

Maggie was murmuring unintelligibly to herself, as

Marion sat by her in the little darkened front bedroom of the doctor's house: her little fat hands, lying outside the coverlet, twitched and writhed, as if she were helping out some explanation with ineffectual gestures.

Marion had learned the main facts by now.

As the pony-cart, late of course, as usual, and driven by the incompetent Jim, Charlie's youngest brother, had turned the corner into the space by Standing station, a motor-car, coming out, had run straight into it. The pony had saved himself cleverly by a wild twist that had brought the wheel of the little cart over a white stone meant to mark the dangerous corner after dark, and, simultaneously the car had struck the cart. The pony had instantly tried to bolt and Maggie had been tossed out, straight under the wheels of the car; and these had passed over her body. It was nobody's fault, or, rather it was everybody's: it was the chauffeur's fault for coming out so fast; it was Jim's for going in so fast: it was Maggie's for telling him to: it was the pony's for not sacrificing himself: it was the railway company's for not widening the entrance to their yard: it was the road-surveyor's for not compelling them to it. Lastly, it was Maggie's, again, for dawdling so long and finishing her note to Marion. If she had started in proper time, nothing would have happened.

Marion was alone with her now: but the door was open, and, in the next room, waited the incapable but well-intentioned country doctor. Father Denny had come over with Marion and had done all that was possible, and was now below, waiting in the front room for a signal that could not be long delayed: he had absolved

and anointed her: he waited now only to commend her soul to God. A little crowd, gathered in the street, gossiped and watched the windows. At the corner of the lane stood the pony and the trap, under the care of Charlie who had ridden over on his forgotten bicycle and sent Jim home in tears. The voices of the little gossiping crowd now and again came to Marion's ears through the open windows and the drawn lace curtains, as she sat and watched. There was nothing to be done. Maggie was unconscious and not in any pain.

There was no dominant emotion or train of thought in the girl's mind. She was just passive, and watched a thousand thoughts defile before her. This unfamiliar figure in the bed simply was not Maggie in any sense which she could recognise except in fleeting glimpses. Her head was bandaged and her sparse hair lay untidily over the linen: her black dress hung over a chair where the doctor's servant had laid it; and a little tumbled linen only showed about her throat.

The thoughts that went so swiftly and confusedly, and yet with a dreadful smoothness, through Marion's mind, were of every kind, great and small: she could not detach or unravel them. She thought of the pony; of the corner by the station that she knew so well; of Maggie's note to her this morning that she had torn up in indignation; of Max waiting in London; of the copy of *Lohengrin* that lay in the music-chest at home; of the quality of the very cheap and pathetically correct lace-curtains that hung over the windows; of the doctor's frayed shirt-cuff; of Mrs. Grant and Jenny: she wondered when Mrs. Grant would be here; she wondered how long Maggie would live, yet she pictured her

also as if she were in the train which she ought to have caught: she looked at the cheap gilded clock, and calculated that the train must have arrived at Liverpool Street twenty minutes ago; she looked at Maggie's left hand on the coverlet, and wondered what the ring was, with the bloodstone, on the little finger.

One thought alone there was that recurred steadily, like a grey background of sky seen from a train as it passes through broken woods, and that was the thought of her own loneliness. She did not pity herself for it: she could not feel any emotion of that kind at present. She simply regarded it as a fact. Her world now, that had been reduced to two persons who really mattered, was on the point of being reduced to one. This time yesterday there had been Max and Maggie. Presently there would be only Max. It was surely strange that she should be so lonely as that! Ah! but all her other friends had only been united to her through her music, and her music was gone: she must not forget that; and she would make no more friends: she had nothing else by which to attract them: she was not really pretty: she was not really clever. She had had a voice, but that had been taken from her by the God who was now taking Maggie too.

Then she began to think about the lace-curtains again: they could not be more than one and tenpence a yard: that is to say, that if the curtains were ——

Ah! was Maggie speaking again? . . .

She leaned her head nearer her friend, and whispered her name, in her hoarse voice. But the grey face on the pillow only twitched a little, and the lips moved inaudibly.

Marion began, passionlessly, to consider the immedi-

ate future. With the remote future she had no concern: that was in Max's hands; but the immediate was in her own. The next three or four days would be accounted for, inevitably . . . but when these were over, and she came back to the cottage alone, what must be done? She could not afford to keep up both the little houses; she might not be able even to afford one, and certainly not the Campden Hill house. Neither could she go abroad now, as she had half consented to do with Maggie; she would be alone, and she would not have enough money. Perhaps it would be better to stay at Standing for the present: there was not a human being in the world whom she could ask to give her hospitality. But Mrs. Grant would probably have to go: she received thirty pounds a year, which would mean a good deal to herself, now. The piano must certainly go: she ought to be able to get a good price for it: it was nearly new, and she would not really need it, in any case.

So she sat, silent, thinking. Somewhere in the universe there was pain beyond bearing, but it did not actually envelop her yet. That would come later, no doubt. At present she was neither heartless nor emotional: she merely existed and contemplated facts as they passed before her without any volition of her own. It was as if she dreamed.

Suddenly Maggie's eyes opened. Her glasses had been taken off: and her eyes looked odd and childish without them. For an instant there was no knowledge in them; and then it came, and she smiled, murmuring something, as if greatly content.

The smile was at once sweet and terrifying.

CHAPTER III

I

To say less than that Max was seriously shocked when he heard from Marion's own lips of the loss of her voice, would be to do him an injustice; and he spent the evening after he had seen her started back to Standing, in a very depressed state of mind.

He felt, in fact, that he could not quite face his people; and the thought of his club in St. James' came to him as a great relief. He telephoned from Liverpool Street for a table, and then to Guy Markheim to meet him in the dining-room at eight. (He had asked Marion whether her news was to be regarded as confidential, and had received the very natural answer that there was no kind of reason for keeping it so. It would be in the papers by the next evening, no doubt.)

St. George's club is very new, and therefore very comfortable. There are no dingy waiting-rooms. There is a big hall at the entrance, with innumerable tables and club arm-chairs, with a tape continually ticking out the news, and a long reading-desk for newspapers, resembling a lectern multiplied by ten lengthways. An opulent staircase descends from the first floor, where are situated the dining-rooms and card-rooms and smoking-room. The deep carpets that lie everywhere, the noiseless plate-glass doors, and the discreet and quiet servants in their dark blue livery with a red collar, combine to make it a very tolerable caravanserai of peace and comfort.

But he was sincerely melancholy as he came in a few

minutes before eight. He nodded to Guy, who started up from the corner, and went straight through to the cloak-room, letting the door swing behind him: but he was astonished to feel a hand on his shoulder as he was getting his coat off, and to see that Guy had followed him, looking rather perturbed.

"I say, old man: is it true?"

"Is what true?" demanded Max.

"Why: about Miss Tenterden's voice. It can't be! But it's just been rapped out on the tape. Central News."

"Yes," said Max, in a low voice, handing over his coat.

"Good God!" said Guy.

"I saw her to-day," said Max, as they went back into the hall. "She came up to tell her manager. I was going to tell you. I suppose he must have sent it to the news agency."

"But ——"

"Yes: I know. We'll talk about it at dinner."

The dining-room is a model of comfortable art; and the *chef* is excellent. Max found that his table had been reserved for him, according to his message, in a corner where it was possible to talk without being overheard; and he spent the first five minutes in selecting the dinner. There was a clear soup: a fillet of sole; a wild-duck, and "angels-on-horseback" for a savoury. Max did not feel up to more: and Guy, it appeared, had no particular preferences and not much of an appetite. There was also selected, after a little consultation, a good little white wine. It was just a model of a dinner, thought Max, for one in his state of melancholy.

They did not talk a great deal till the duck appeared. Max just told his friend the outline of the story, and how the verdict had been ratified. The poor girl's voice was completely gone: there was no hope whatever that it would come back. Sir John had said so himself. Guy gave vent to the proper exclamations.

The conversation, however, became slightly more animated, as the duck disappeared, and considerably more than half of the Niersteiner.

"It's one of the greatest tragedies I've ever come across," said Max; "but she's a brave little girl. She told me quite simply."

"Ah!" said Guy.

"Every one has been delightfully kind, she says," he continued. "Her old German professor actually cried, she told me: and even Harrison was as decent as . . . as a Jew who pretends he isn't one, could be expected to be. I'm sure they ought to be. They must have made a little fortune out of her between them."

"No doubt they're honestly sorry," remarked Guy cynically. "I'm sure I should be."

"But think what it must be to her," went on Max. "She only came out in January, you know: she hasn't had six months of it, all told. (Yes: I think another half-bottle.) It really is one of the most terrible things I've ever heard of. It's given me a real shock."

"You know her rather well, don't you?"

"Yes: quite well. My sister's a friend of hers. She was with us in Scotland last year, you know. Hullo! There's old Sir Robert! Who's he dining with, I wonder? And I wonder if he's heard. He admired her awfully, you know."

Guy turned in his seat.

"Yes, there he is. Why, he's coming ——"

Max stood up respectfully as the famous old soldier came.

"Ah! good evening, Merival. Good evening, Markheim. Is this news about Miss Tenterden true? I saw it on the tape downstairs."

"I'm afraid so. I . . . I happened to meet her only to-day. She came up to tell her manager."

"But is there no hope?"

"None at all. The specialist was absolutely certain. It's the result of a little operation — quite unimportant in itself, too."

The old man was silent a moment.

"Poor child!" he said suddenly. "Well: I mustn't stay: my friend's waiting. But, if you see her or write to her, you might just give her my sympathy. Poor child! the one single gift she had, poor little soul! And what a loss to the English opera-house, too!"

"Yes: it's very sad. I'll tell her what you say."

"Thanks."

Max sat down again, as the old man with a nod and a smile went back to his own table.

"Now there's a kind old boy!" he said.

"Oh, yes; he's all right," said Guy rather coldly. "Is he a great friend of yours?"

"Not particularly. Why?"

"He's a heartless old chap, rather: that's all. He's kind enough as long as it doesn't cost him any trouble. It doesn't go very deep."

"Is that so?"

"He doesn't like me," pursued Guy, busy with his "angel-on-horseback"; "because I happen to know about him; at least I happen to know something he once did."

"What was that?"

"Oh! nothing much. It was only about one of his servants, who came to me from him: said he was a real Tartar in private, though he has family prayers and all that. Anyhow, he grossly underpaid this man and finally sacked him without a character. These big men have generally got a leak somewhere. Well, that's his. He's charming enough on the top: but there's nothing much underneath."

II

The club was delightfully empty now that August had begun: and the two friends were fortunate enough to find the little extra reading-room under the stairs actually empty. Max ordered a couple of *chasse-cafés*, coffee and cigars to be brought to them there. His melancholy was certainly lightened; but it was still upon him. There are some woes for which even a dinner and a bottle of Niersteiner and a *chasse-café* resembling an oily rainbow cannot remove altogether. He suddenly sighed.

"I say, old man," said Guy, who was feeling very communicative, and quite undiplomatic in spite of his experience in Constantinople.

"Yes?"

"I'm going to say something most infernally impertinent. D'you mind?"

Max glanced up. He did not look offended.

"Go on," he said.

"Well: it's about that girl. I rather fancied — eh?"

Max was silent.

"I daresay I'm wrong," pursued Guy. "Anyhow, it's not my business. But when we went down to see her the other day ——"

Max sighed again, and shifted his position. But it sounded like a sigh of relief.

"You're perfectly right," he said. "And I'm rather glad you've spoken of it. I'm in a devil of a hole: and I'd like your advice."

"Ah!" said Guy wisely.

"To prevent misunderstanding I might as well say straight off that I've been engaged to her ever since January."

"Good Lord!" said Guy, really shocked. "Do you mean that?"

"Yes: I do. No more and no less. This is absolutely confidential, of course. If my people heard of it, they'd have a fit. I rather think my sister suspected something at one time; but she certainly doesn't now. I've been too damned careful. Well: this is the hole I'm in. I'm absolutely dependent on the governor; and what I'd meant to do was to go to him this month or next, and get him to put me into something. I'm not much good at business: but I suppose I could get along. Then when I was more or less independent, the thing was to come off. Well: now it seems to me the whole thing's muddled. She's lost her income: and I don't suppose she's saved much this year. Of course if this vile thing hadn't happened we'd have been pretty well off. But how the devil are we to live on what I make?"

"Won't your people come round?"

"My dear chap! You might as well try to move the Bank of England. I know perfectly well what the governor wants. He wants me to marry some one of our own sort — some pretty little thing with no brains, and, if possible, a title. I don't want to say what I shouldn't: but you know, he's got a little bit of the snob in him. Well, if I did that, he'd allow me, I daresay, five or six thousand a year at least. But a girl like Marion! — Good Lord, no! He doesn't even get on with her very well."

"Haven't you got any one else you could go to?"

"Not a soul, except the Jews. I've no doubt they'd make me big advances on my prospects. But then I don't want to go to the Jews. Besides, the governor might live another twenty years, easily. I'm sure I hope he will. And if I did this, there's no knowing what he mightn't do. There's not much entailed, you know."

"But you'd have had to face that, anyhow," said Guy.

"Yes: I know I should. But I shouldn't have minded if I'd been really independent without him. If this infernal thing hadn't happened, I daresay she'd have been making twenty thousand herself, in a year or two."

There was silence. Guy drew several soul-satisfying draughts on his cigar.

"Well ——" he began.

"Yes?"

"I know what I should do."

"Well: go on: that's what I want to hear."

Guy paused again for a second. He was not sure how his friend would take his next remark.

"Well: I should put the case before her: exactly as it stands."

Max flushed a little.

"You mean ——"

"I mean exactly what I say. She struck me as exceedingly sensible ——"

"I'm not a cad!" interrupted Max: "that simply means throwing her over."

"It means nothing of the sort," asserted Guy with some warmth; "it means being simply honest. She's got as much right to know what lies before her, as you have ——"

"She knows already," said Max.

"Yes: but I bet she doesn't realise it; and she won't, unless you put it plainly. What girl would? It seems to me that in simple justice you are bound to tell her the facts; that you will have nothing whatever, except what you make; that you have no expectations for years — in fact, all that you've been telling me. At any rate she'll know then what to expect."

"I tell you she does know."

Guy shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well then. There's nothing else for you to do."

There was silence again.

Max was thinking furiously. Somehow that food and wine seemed to have warmed up his wits as well as his emotions. Yet he was not thinking very consecutively: he thought just how tragic it all was: how fond he was of Marion; how pathetically simple she had been

this afternoon; how astounding was the ill-fortune that had befallen not only her but him also. For it was not the loss of her income and her prospects, not even the loss of her voice, that lay most heavily upon his mind, but the loss of that appeal to the imagination with which her stage-life endowed her. He was beginning to catch very penetrating glimpses of this last point. Of course Marion was Marion, but then Marion had also been Elsa and was Elsa no longer. She had lost that particular glamour. However, obviously, he said to himself that was not the main affair, as regarded by reason: the chief trouble was that the mere material future was affected, and he could not see how to act.

"What does Miss Brent say?" asked Guy suddenly.

"Miss Brent? Why: she doesn't know. You see there's some trouble about her religion too. Marion Tenterden's a Catholic; and it seems she'll have to break with the Church."

"Break with the Church? Why?"

"Oh! there are some ridiculous conditions which neither she nor I would dream of giving in to: so it seems that the Catholics won't recognise the marriage. Damned idiots! Just like them."

"By Gad! I didn't know she was a Catholic."

"I told you, didn't I? Anyhow, she is. And that makes it all the worse with my people. The governor simply loathes them. That's another point. I'd forgotten that."

"Lord! what a tangle!" sighed Guy. "Then there's no hope from Miss Brent."

"I should think not! Marion thinks Miss Brent will chuck her altogether, as soon as she knows."

"My dear man, I'm sorry for you!"

"What the devil's the good of saying that?" snapped Max, suddenly irritated. It did indeed seem a tangle, elicited point by point by Guy.

"Sorry, old man!"

Max grunted.

III

Small irritations fell on him thickly this evening, to make his affairs look still darker.

As he came into the hall at home, his father was crossing it, and stopped.

"That you, Max?"

"Yes."

"Where have you been?"

"Dining at the club. I told mother."

Lord Merival looked vexed.

"I know you did. But you didn't tell her till after seven: and it threw her table out. I wish you would try to remember those little things, my boy. It was extraordinarily inconvenient. Mr. Percival had to dine with us, at short notice."

Max was silent. He saw perfectly what had happened. There had been a minute dinner-party, entirely unimportant: his mother had only mentioned it very casually, and had told him his absence didn't matter really, if he wanted to go out. But his father had heard of it, and had ordered his unhappy little secretary to serve as substitute; and he didn't like Mr. Percival to come to dinner too often: it might exalt him overmuch and make him a bad secretary.

"Try to think a little more of your mother's convenience, my boy, and less of your own."

"Sorry."

"That's all right. By the way, is it true that that girl — Miss Tenterden, isn't it? — has lost her voice? Norah told us it was on the placards, as she came."

"It was on the tape at the club," said Max cautiously.

"Ah! well. Sad if it's really true. Good night, my boy."

"Good night, father."

His depression came down on him with renewed weight when he finally sat down in the smoking-room. The very tone that his father had used just now, in speaking of Marion, emphasised, quite lightly but quite distinctly, his attitude towards her. She was "that girl," and it was really "quite sad" if she had indeed lost her voice. That was all. And it was "that girl" whom he himself was to marry, next year at the latest!

He drank a generous mouthful, and considered it all over again.

One thing was perfectly clear, that he must not in the remotest degree allow his behaviour to resemble that of a cad. Not of course that he could have any intention of that kind, in reality — how could he have? For was he not simply devoted to Marion? But he must not say or do anything that might lead her to suspect that he even cared in the smallest degree for either the social or the financial aspect of their future. In fact the safest thing was to say nothing at all about finance, unless she did. After all, by this time next year he would probably have a competence: it would not be very comfortable, but it would be sufficient. And, as for the social side, really that did not matter. It was surely an axiom

in English society that a wife took the rank of her husband. There might be a few difficulties, just at first: it would be very tiresome, for instance, if they had to go and live in a suburb — perhaps even in Bedford Park itself! But things would right themselves, at any rate in a year or two.

He took another mouthful.

It was really curious what a glamour the stage had; and, above all, the operatic stage; even what a dignity it conferred. It was quite a different thing from Musical Comedy: he had passed through that callow period at least two years ago. But the Operatic Stage — that was a serious matter. Really it was a distinction to have a wife who came from it. How splendid she had been as Elsa! He could see her, now, in his imagination — in that white costume of the First Act. How she had held the house! What a rustle there had been, and then what a silence, as she began to sing. And, what a storm of voices and hands as she ended! That storm seemed to irradiate her figure as he regarded it. And that girl, that incarnate fountain of music, that glorious bride of Lohengrin, was to be his bride. . . .

Ah! how sad that all that was ended!

He took another mouthful: and presently his eyes filled gently with tears.

Poor dear Marion! What a tragic thing it all was! But he would make it up to her; and he lit a final cigarette in his generosity. Of course they would be most happy together. Who could possibly doubt that? After all, love was the thing that mattered; and how dearly he loved that trim alert creature, so oddly like a

boy in some of her moods, who had gone deer-stalking with him in Scotland, who had ridden with him and Norah in the Park.

Really it was all perfectly right: and he was a fool to let those miserable financial and social things worry him. What did it matter, after all, what people said? What did it matter, if you come to that, what even his father said, or did: or Norah? Certainly Norah had done well for herself: Gerald was an ass; but he was a good ass; and undoubtedly most respectable as a husband.

Ah! well! Marion and he would be happier: for they had what obviously Norah and Gerald could not have. They would be happy — very happy indeed.

He finished his whisky, and threw away his cigarette.

IV

He woke once in the night, and his mood was still on him. The hush of a London early morning — the hush, at any rate, of Park Lane at that hour, helped to quiet any misgivings. It would all be perfectly right. . . . He must not behave like a cad . . . he must not take Guy's advice. . . . They would be exquisitely happy together.

Dear Marion! . . .

Poor Marion! . . .

Poor dear Marion! . . .

CHAPTER IV

I

THERE was quite a little crowd in Standing to see poor Miss Brent's funeral go by; Mr. Braddon, the grocer, had even gone so far, remembering the funeral of Queen Victoria, as to put his shutters up; for Standing was really fond of the fussy little lady, in its quiet way. She was always so exceedingly polite and pleasant to everybody, not "like a lady" at all, one-half of the population said, presumably from the Radical point of view; "just like a real lady," the sterner feudalists declared. Therefore there were groups on that wet August afternoon as the small procession in broughams started on its five-mile drive to the Catholic cemetery at Newlands. Mrs. Braddon stood, with a look of true melancholy satisfaction on her face, in the door of the darkened shop, Mr. Braddon stood in front of his shutters, with his hat off and his coat on: and there was scarcely a door in the village that was not occupied at least by a woman and a couple of children. The postcart itself drew up, not at the postoffice at all, to give plenty of room.

But there was hardly any crowd at all as the single brougham drove back with Miss Tenterden, alone, inside it; because everybody was at tea, the men were come home from the farms and fields. Mr. Braddon, indeed, ran out, to take off his hat, for he knew quite well that Miss Tenterden had been something of a personage this last summer: he even had exhibited a couple

of picture postcards of her in his window, to the bewilderment of humble, kindly Standing which could not conceive that a person who lived in so small a house actually in Standing Street could be of any importance anywhere else. But Mr. Braddon was having his tea too, when he heard the wheels, and ran out too late with his tribute of respect, his cheeks still working with bread and butter; and Marion never saw him after all.

She was still in something of a dream. For it appeared to her as if all her emotions had broken loose, and as if she could only watch them as from an isolated rock above the torrent. Those little combinations and groups she had attempted to form — the little reservoirs of bitterness that she had tried to make — all were now simply broken down under the shock of Maggie's death, and she was in confusion once more. She had had her moments of anguish: she had cried uncontrollably the first night after the death; she had had glimpses, broadening a little as the three days passed on, of what life would be like without that dear funny person with whom she had lived lately: she had broken down again altogether one morning when Rhadamanthus, without any provocation, suddenly turned and cursed her in the rose garden; and she had not even put on the green baize cover to silence him. But even now these were but glimpses; and the horrible need of being practical and businesslike to-day, and of saying the right things to the pair of relations sent "to represent" (she was given to understand) the famous Aunt Gwendolen who still throve upon her sick bed in Somersetshire — these duties had but increased the sense of unreality. The very

funeral itself was but a rather senseless pageant.

She was a little puzzled about these representatives of Aunt Gwendolen; for it appeared to her that for some reason or another they were rather angry and severe. They were both ladies: but they had quite different names, and yet they were as politely cross to one another as two sisters: neither were their names anything like Brent, or the more formidable Savage of Aunt Gwendolen's.

They had made distant allusions to Marion's future which she had not in the least understood, and thought rather impertinent: they had eyed the furniture of the cottage, after lunch, and exchanged glances: they had, altogether, rather the air of tolerably well-bred female bailiffs who occasionally, under great provocation, forgot their manners. They had expressed sympathy, as if they were trying hard not to be sarcastic, about Marion's sad misfortune with her voice. With these two, she had driven, solemnly, all the way to Newlands, and then had deposited them at Newlands station to take the train back to London, and thence, she supposed, to Aunt Gwendolen and Somersetshire.

Her first real and piercing anguish to-day came as she went into the little cottage and shut the door. She had given leave to Mrs. Grant and Jenny to stay to tea with the housekeeper of the Newlands priest: Father Denny was to bring them back an hour later; and the silence, and the sense of emptiness, that the cottage wore, struck on her like a chill. It seemed to her, in those first minutes, as if indeed it was a symbol of her future. . . . She threw herself into the convent chair, whose cover was perpetually wearing out, in which Maggie sat when

they were in the parlour together, and kissed its back. Then she broke into a storm of sobbing. . . .

She went out after a few minutes, to take her things off; and noticed that a couple of letters were lying on the chest in the hall, and that the handwriting of the uppermost envelope was that of Max.

It was a very sympathetic and tender note which she read, still standing there. He was in Yorkshire for the week end, the letter said, to shoot on the twelfth, and had only just received hers, telling him of Maggie's death. He would be coming back through London, on his way to Farley, in three or four days. Could they not meet? He would be delighted to come down to her for a few hours, or would she prefer to meet him in town? He was horrified to think of the shock that she must have had. How was she? What plans had she for the immediate future? Could he be of the slightest use in any way at all?

She kissed the signature, as she finished.

The other letter was in a very businesslike hand, and looked entirely dull; and she left it lying there till she came downstairs again. Then, still standing again, she opened it and read it through: then she read it again, unable to believe what she read. Then she went into the parlour and sat down, with the letter still open in her hand. She understood at last the mystery of Aunt Gwendolen's representatives.

The letter was from Maggie's lawyers whom she knew perfectly by name. It stated, quite explicitly, that they had had instructions from Miss Brent, in the event of her death, to communicate at once with Miss Tenterden, and to inform her that the bulk of Miss Brent's

property, amounting to about fourteen thousand pounds, had been bequeathed to her. The letter mentioned that it was Miss Brent's particular wish that no gift should be made by Miss Tenterden to Miss Brent's relations: these were already amply provided for: further that this wish was practically a matter of conscience, as it was Miss Brent's deliberate desire that the money should not be used for anti-Catholic propaganda, as it certainly would be if it fell into the hands of her own relations. All these instructions, the letter stated, were contained in a memorandum in Miss Brent's own hand, dated in the previous spring; this memorandum, as well as the actual will, were in the lawyers' possession, and a representative of the firm would be happy to wait upon Miss Tenterden immediately, with these documents, or to receive her by appointment, if she cared to call. A sentence at the end added that it might be convenient for Miss Tenterden to know also that all the furniture in the two houses, and all Miss Brent's personal property, was included in the bequest, with the exception of a few articles of jewellery, of no intrinsic value, that were specially left to Miss Gwendolen Savage.

It was only gradually, in her already dazed condition, that she understood how completely her circumstances were changed by the news. Instead of three hundred a year, she would now have about nine — not indeed a fortune, but sufficient to remove every anxiety and to settle the difficulties which she had begun to foresee as threatening the plans with regard to her marriage.

Then a thought struck her; and she read it again. No, it was absolutely clear that it was Maggie's deliber-

ate wish that her relations should have nothing of it: how like Maggie, too, to insert that little clause about anti-Catholic propaganda! To refuse the legacy would be to traverse her friend's explicit wishes.

Then a second thought struck her; and at that she caught her breath. Once more she read the letter, but almost without attention; then she laid it on her knee and stared out at nothing. Something that was very nearly physical pain began to make itself felt about her heart.

II

It would be about half an hour later that she heard first the very loud rattle in the passage and then the very subdued tinkle in the kitchen which announced that some one was ringing the bell. She sat perfectly still: she was in no mood for visitors. Again came the rattle and again the tinkle; and again she sat still. But, as she heard the gate clash she could not resist peeping from the window; and there was the Panama hat and the grey suit of the Rector going by. An impulse seized her: she ran out, opened the front door, and called to him. He lifted his hat as he came towards her.

"I am extremely sorry for disturbing you," he said. "I simply meant to leave a card and inquire. I had no idea ——"

"The servants aren't back yet. Won't you come in?"

"Really, I think I had better not ——" he began "I had no intention at all."

"No: but please come in," she said. It seemed to her that she simply must have a distraction from these new

bewilderments; and she was sure he would not be tiresome or obtrusive.

He followed her in quite simply.

"I just wanted to express my sympathy," he said quietly, looking at her with his kindly eyes. "I knew that there is nothing more to be said."

They talked a few minutes very naturally about Maggie. He even allowed a touch of humour to come in, and the girl liked him for it.

"Well: I am sure she won't be disappointed," he said: "there are many mansions, after all; we both believe that; don't we? — though perhaps not quite in the same sense."

Marion smiled back at him.

"Oh! it'll be all right," she said, "so long as she isn't asked to live in any one else's mansion."

As he stood up to take his leave, again an impulse seized her.

"Sit down again, Mr. Cholmondeley, please; if you can spare the time. I want to ask you something. May I? And will you promise not to draw deductions?"

"I quite understand," he said. "Yes?"

"Supposing," she began slowly, seeking for her parallel, "yes: suppose some one's last wishes were that . . . that . . . oh! well; let's say, that you shouldn't go to Australia; and supposing you were absolutely sure that it was right for you to go. Could you — well — possibly be justified in using that person's steam-yacht to go there?"

She looked up at him, and, to her surprise, saw that his face looked distressed and anxious.

"Remember about the deductions, please," she added

quickly, "and, remember you're absolutely certain that it's right to go; and well, let's say that you've no chance, humanly speaking, of getting there without that steam-yacht, at least not for years. What ought you to do?"

He stood up.

"Miss Tenterden," he said, "I'm not a theologian. I don't know. I simply don't know. I would very much prefer that you shouldn't press me for an answer. It's about the most difficult problem in the world."

"But surely ——" she began.

"These are purely personal matters," he said hastily: "Miss Tenterden — I hate to say it; but these things depend wholly on one's own way of looking at things. I really don't know what I think: and I am quite sure I am not competent to advise you."

Again the heaviness fell on her; for she perceived that here was one more possible help that had failed her. She had asked him as simply as she would have asked a priest, never dreaming but that he would do his best to advise her; yet, obviously, he would not meet her on that level. He was a pleasant and a kindly man, but, like so many other pleasant and kindly men, he disliked complications. She sighed; it had been an impulse that had made her speak to him — an impulse arising from that isolation that seemed closing round her so inexorably — and there was no response.

She stood up, too.

"I understand," she said quietly. "Well: thank you so much for coming. It was really kind of you."

III

When the little party came back as dusk was com-

ing on, Mrs. Grant went to look for her new mistress, telling Jenny to begin to prepare for supper. She wished just to satisfy herself that all was well.

But it was not until after a few minutes that she found her at last going quickly up and down beyond the roses, still in her hat and black cloak, with a letter in her hand.

"I beg pardon, Miss," began the housekeeper. "Why, Miss ——!"

"What is it?" said the figure that turned and faced her.

"Nothing, Miss; I just came to see — you'll have supper at half-past eight as usual, Miss?"

She was trying to make out the expression on the girl's face. For the first moment it had seemed that it was not Miss Tenterden at all.

"Yes," said Marion. . . . "Mrs. Grant."

"Yes, Miss?"

"I suppose Father Denny's back?"

"Yes, Miss; do you wish to see him, Miss?"

There was a pause before the other answered.

"No: it doesn't matter. I'll let you know if I do. Oh! and by the way, would you mind sending for Maximilian back again? He's been away long enough."

The figure resumed its pacing; and Mrs. Grant hurried back to the house to scold Jenny on general principles.

Half an hour later it was nearly dark: the housekeeper had glanced out of the low kitchen window once or twice, and each time had been able to make out the figure moving up and down. It seemed to her all very curious, and not at all the way in which grief should affect a young lady: she could understand, well enough,

the fact that there were no tea-things to take away: that was most correct; it was a sign of the highest sensitiveness to be able to take no food; but to walk quickly up and down, and to speak almost sharply, was not in the least appropriate. But then Mrs. Grant remembered that this particular young lady always was a little strange, and not in the least like poor Miss Brent, who was "gone." And at that memory her own eyes filled with tears.

At a quarter-past eight it was too dark to see any one against the yew hedge; and, still a little uneasy, she sent Jenny out to say that it was a quarter-past eight, and that hot water had been taken upstairs. Jenny came back a minute later to say that Miss Tenterden was not in the garden.

"Nonsense, child!" said the housekeeper. "She was there ten minutes ago. I saw her; and she isn't in the house, because we'd have heard her come in."

Jenny reaffirmed that Miss Tenterden was not in the garden: and Mrs. Grant, with an exclamation of impatience, herself went out to look.

IV

Within the little church, Marion knelt in the dusk, with her head on her hands, in an agony of conflict.

For it had come upon her suddenly, more than an hour ago, as she had read the lawyers' letter for the second time, that although she could not indeed hand back the legacy to Maggie's relations, she could not, conceivably, accept it for herself; and that her rush of relief was just one more bit of Divine mockery, like those that had preceded it. For an almost joyous minute or two she had seen the last difficulties rolled

away; she had seen the prospect of her marriage suddenly approach: she had thought of Max's relief, and of the letter that she would write to him. And then, she had understood.

For the will had been made a few months ago, at a time when Maggie would as soon have thought of doubting Marion's fidelity to the Church, as of doubting her own; she had made that will in her confidence and generosity, believing that there would benefit by it one whom she loved and believed in: she had actually put in that little clause about her own relations, as if to emphasise that conscience came in. Well: since then, less than a week ago, her confidence had been completely overthrown, and Marion had revealed to her the true state of affairs, showing her that her future intentions were of such a character as to be incompatible with a profession of the Catholic religion. Of course Maggie had not had time to alter her will — it was as humanly certain as anything could be that such an idea had never even occurred to her mind; but it was also certain — was it not? — that if she had had time she would surely have done so. Was it conceivable that Maggie should wish that her money should go to support a woman, who had been once her friend, and who was living as if in wedlock with a man to whom, according to Maggie's whole-hearted conviction, she was not married — to a woman, moreover, who, in order to contract that union had forsaken the religion which Maggie held to be Divine?

That, then, was the side of conscience; and the stress of conflict came from the thought that at any rate legally and, many would think, morally as well, she had an absolute right to the bequest. Legally, of

course, it was beyond question hers; and even morally, if it were regarded from her own standpoint, it was hers too. For, if it were really true that she believed herself justified in marrying Max, under the conditions she proposed to accept — if she believed, in fact, that her broad-mindedness corresponded to truth as God saw it, more nearly than Maggie's narrow-mindedness, then indeed she was justified. For in any case the bequest would not be used in the only way in which Maggie had definitely expressed a wish that it should not: the relations would not have it: there was no anti-Catholic propaganda in the matter. On the contrary she had always contemplated the possibility of Max consenting later on to the promises, and herself asking him to do so. She did not in the least want to quarrel with the Church; the quarrel was of the Church's seeking, not hers. Then had she not a perfect right, even in the sight of God Himself, to accept this clearing of her path and this issue out of her troubles?

And, as she reached that point, once more the other side surged back; and she bent her head again upon her hands. She knew she must fight it out herself. In the first desperate moment of bewilderment she had tried to get help from another; and he had failed her.

Out there in the garden it had been no good. There had been no voice nor any that answered. On the one side the apse of the church, with the glimmer through the windows, had stood up against the darkening sky: on the other the sweep of the hills beyond the village; and she had faced these alternately — Grace and Na-

ture — as she faced the alternatives within her own soul. So, at last, driven by the stress within, she had come into the church for a few minutes before it was locked up for the night, drawn there, subconsciously, if she had but known it, by her memories from the past, and consciously by a desire for space and silence and uninterruptedness. And, when she had got there, she had knelt down.

It was strange how, little by little, unperceived by herself in its process, this place soothed and quieted her. It was not that the conflict was less acute in itself, but that she felt more apart from it; and that, in spite of the fact that thought after thought presented itself to her now which hardly had occurred to her in the garden. Yet she was able to regard them now, without shrinking from their contemplation, as if caught in disloyalty.

For instance she was able now to examine, without passion or terror, that thought of hers, conceived long ago in the early morning, that Max might lose a little, at least, of his interest in her, now that her voice was gone and her stage-career ended.

But she passed on presently from that, since she was truly unable to imagine that there could possibly be any truth in it: after all, certainly she loved to think of Max on the moors in his delightful shooting costume, with that particular look in his eyes that she remembered, but she did not love him because he went deer-stalking: she loved Max, deer-stalking or otherwise. Very well, then; it was natural that he should love to watch her as Elsa and to hear her singing: but

that could not possibly mean that he would cease to love her when she was only Marion Tenterden; for it was Marion Tenterden whom he loved.

So she moved on, and thought with real anguish (for this was solid enough) that without this money her marriage must be almost indefinitely postponed. It was all very well for Max to talk about his place in the City; but, in fact, he had not yet even approached the subject with his father. Yet with this bequest the way was perfectly clear: there was no reason why they should not be married in six months.

Yet even this anguish of indecision did not penetrate deeply in this atmosphere: or, rather, while it penetrated deeply, she was able to watch it without perturbation.

Suddenly she lifted her head again and looked before her.

The little church in itself was not in the least remarkable; it had been built by a priest with more zeal than money, and intentions that were better than his taste. It had no distinction; yet it was not at all offensive. Three lancet windows, without tracing, rose behind the high altar: the altar itself was decent and unpretentious: six brass candlesticks and a crucifix stood upon it. The white cloth glimmered in the dusk, and in the faint light cast by the sanctuary lamp. For the rest, there was nothing to attract attention: a statue of Blessed Mary stood to the right of the chancel arch; but it was so dark now that nothing but an outline could be discerned. Beyond it, still further to the right, the wavering light flickered on the silver pipes of the little positive organ which Father

Denny had recently installed. Marion herself had given a subscription to it, as she was "interested in music."

At these things then she looked; and, as she looked was aware that something was happening.

Now the church was practically dark with shadows, at least in all but the sanctuary itself; and it was also as silent as death. It stood at the remote end of the village, on the only piece of ground that could be obtained for it fifteen years ago; and the villagers were within doors. But it appeared to this girl, overwrought and strained as she was, that the darkness and the silence of which she was aware were too profound to be produced by physical conditions only: they had a quality in them, not merely negative — which is all that they have a right to — but as being the vehicle and the covering of something very positive indeed; and this positive something at once terrified and fascinated her.

For a moment or two she fought against it, as a child fights against his terrors in the dark; and then she could fight no more. For the place seemed charged with force; and the force was irresistible; and she knelt there, unable to stir, with her hair prickling on her head, and her clasped hands suddenly turned cold. She did not know what she expected. Now it was the sanctuary lamp that frightened her; now the dark curtains over the little tabernacle below; now the tilted shoulder and head of the statue against the faint luminosity of the sanctuary wall. Each of these in turn appeared to her as the focus from which the power would manifest itself; and from each it passed: and

it seemed rather that the place itself was full of energy.

And then, without warning, it was the presence of Maggie, she thought, that approached her; and the effect of that presence was as the effect of the dreams she had, now and again, of her father, in which he appeared to her at once dead and alive, himself, yet infinitely mysterious and august, with a secret which he could not utter. So there came on her now this thought of Maggie; and she glared, moving her eyes only, for she dared not move her head, towards the heavy shadows on this side and that of the chancel arch, looking for the coming out of them of that figure that had been carried this afternoon down the stairs of the cottage, out to the hearse, and so along the country road.

In those moments all else seemed remote: the very conflict that had so surged in her soul just now — Max, the cottage, Father Denny, the village, her past and her future — these things became secondary and apart in the terrific reality of the present. And yet it was not all terrific; there was a strange sensation of pleasure mingled with the very fear. It was as the smile that Maggie had worn as she died in silence, terrifying, but also sweet.

V

It was nearly a quarter to nine before Mrs. Grant bethought herself of the church. Indeed she had thought of it before, but had dismissed it again: it was not Miss Tenterden's way to go to church all by herself, she had noticed lately. But, after she had gone through the cottage, and down the garden, and

even a little way up the street, and, finally had heard from Jenny whom she had despatched round to the back door of the presbytery, to inquire of the priest's housekeeper, that Miss Tenterden had not been there all day, at last she went round herself to the west door of the church and looked in.

The church seemed to her, coming from outside, where faint twilight still lingered, as black as night; but she thought she heard a sort of sob (as she described it to Mrs. Mulligan afterwards) and the next moment down came Miss Tenterden, not even genuflecting, so far as she could see, and caught hold of her.

"Why, Miss, wherever have you been?" demanded Mrs. Grant.

"Come away: come away," whispered the girl. "Shut the door behind you. I can't."

Certainly poor Miss Tenterden was terribly upset, thought Mrs. Grant: and little wonder after all she had been through to-day. She shut the door, as she was bidden; and, as she did it, round came Father Denny to lock up. She noticed Miss Tenterden straighten herself up a little, when she saw the priest: but she said nothing; nor did he.

"Dear me, Miss," she said as they walked back the few yards that separated the church from the cottage, "you've been a long time in church."

"Have I, Mrs. Grant?"

"Yes, Miss."

"Would Jenny mind sleeping in my room to-night? I'm . . . I'm rather upset."

"Why of course she shall, Miss!"

"Thanks."

She seemed to recover, thought Mrs. Grant, as soon as she got back into the house.

When Mrs. Grant came in at the end of supper, she seemed entirely herself again.

"Mrs. Grant," she said, "don't say anything to Jenny, if you haven't already."

"I have, Miss: and she's been moving her bed in."

"Oh! very well then. But only for to-night. She can go back to her own room to-morrow."

"Very good, Miss. Night prayers as usual, I suppose, Miss."

"Yes, please: at a quarter to ten. And what about the cat?"

"He'll be back to-morrow morning, Miss."

CHAPTER V

I

Marion awoke at dawn, into that complete clarity of mind into which often those do awake who have fallen asleep in a state of great mental conflict. The moment she opened her eyes she had all the considerations before her, as well as a very vivid memory of that strange experience of terror and a painful kind of pleasure that had come to her as she knelt in church. She knew, too, that her mind was not yet made up, and that a decision had yet to be formed.

She listened for a minute or two to Jenny's measured breathing; and suddenly had a desire for a complete physical solitude: it had been the beginning of that instinct last night that had made her try to recall the suggestion that the girl should sleep in her room. Then a bird asked a loud sweet question from the garden; and she made up her mind, and slipped out of bed.

She opened a wardrobe noiselessly, and took out from it an old travelling cloak, with a hood, which she occasionally wore on rainy days in the garden; and put this on. Then she put on her stockings, still without a sound, and carrying her shoes in her hand, opened the door and went out. Immediately opposite was the door of Maggie's room; and as she saw it, for an instant a little shiver of fear ran through her, a reminiscence of last night. Then, ashamed of herself, she opened the door and looked in.

A minute later she was going downstairs; and there were tears in her eyes. She carried a single white flower that had fallen from the bed and lain there unnoticed since yesterday.

The little house looked strange to her in that strange light, at once familiar and unknown. Rhadamanthus' cage was on the chest in the hall, and she tapped gently on the green baize cover as she came down to it. A single hoarse complaint came from within; and then the sudden ruffle of feathers. She was smiling, as she unlatched the house-door and slipped out.

Ah! this was what she wanted.

Before her lay the garden, glimmering grey in the light that brings in the dawn. Far away, beyond the stream, were the low-backed Hertfordshire hills, with the two windmills, clear cut against the great gash of yellow that the dawn was beginning to make in the night sky. All tints above a certain point in the scale of colour were paler than by day: all below it, darker. The grass was a quiet grey with green stealing through; the yews were black, as were also the shadows below the trees on either side. The last roses, some nearly black, some all but luminous, dotted themselves amongst their own grey foliage. The morning star shone high on her right, like a crumb of diamond.

Again the bird asked his question; but there was no one yet to answer, as she stepped out into that divine freshness and felt the silence rest on her like a caress. This was what she wanted — an absolute physical loneliness. She had great things to think of: and a de-

cision to make. Other decisions too began faintly to show themselves to her mind.

Yet, as she went up and down the dewy grass, once more these great things began to recede, and a yet greater to absorb her. Again, as last night, it was not that these problems did not remain unsolved, but rather that it was no longer that their solution was urgent. One thing she had done last night; though at present she did not realise its significance, and that was to write an answer to thank Max for his note, and say she would send a line a day or so later to suggest a meeting place, but an answer that omitted any reference to Maggie's bequest. At present she did not see the significance of this; she had thought only that she must have more time to think; and yet, now that she was out in the silence and the life of the awakening world — a world that had slowly opened its eyes, but was still lying quiet — she felt less inclined than ever to settle it.

Then, as she walked there came on her a memory of *Lohengrin* — of that scene in the Second Act, when the dawn is breaking and the question has been asked on which all depends. Exteriorly there seemed little enough in common between the two — between the hot stage, and the low glare of the footlights and the great throbbing orchestra on the one side, and the inexpressible coolness and peace of this garden on the other. Yet, beneath, there was something that united the two; there was expectation, there was a certain sense of almost luxurious fear; there was a hint of impending loneliness.

Loneliness! That was the word she wanted; and

as she dwelt on it, for the first time she understood that the word did not imply desolation, since while it meant the absence of very much, it might mean — even if it practically did not already mean — the presence of something else. For, somehow, the utter loneliness became a positive thing; it was like the darkness and silence of the little church last night; so far from being mere emptiness, all else seemed empty beside it. It was like . . . it was like — (she hesitated for an illustration) — like the loneliness of that Morning Star set in blue enamel; like . . . like the loneliness of the glimmering light, seen through the lancet window.

As the sun showed its bright rim beyond the windmills, and all colours sprang again to life, she went back into the little house, still carrying with her the white flower she had brought out. The birds, too, were beginning to answer. . . .

II

Mrs. Grant was so much exercised in her mind as to the little scene of last night, that she slipped upstairs herself to see whether all was well, after hearing from Jenny that Miss Marion was still fast asleep, when she had come down. All seemed very well indeed: Miss Tenterden did not move or speak as she softly opened the door. She went away again quietly.

All round, in fact, Mrs. Grant was feeling exercised. For example, she did not know in the least whether she would be wanted here, or whether, indeed, if she was wanted, that she would consent to remain. Miss Brent had been easy enough to manage, though irri-

tating at times: Miss Tenterden could not be managed at all. It was not that she was unreasonable, but that she was positive: she knew what she wanted, and assumed that she would get it. Yet she was not a complaining mistress. There was also the question of wages: she doubted very much whether Miss Tenterden could afford to pay her what she had been receiving from Miss Brent. On the whole she thought that she would see how the land lay, as soon as possible: she must be thinking about other plans if she were not to remain here. Accordingly she was more than a little snappish towards poor Jenny.

Her chance fell straight into her hands after breakfast; for Marion herself opened the subject, so soon as the small household consultation had been held in the parlour.

"By the way, Mrs. Grant," said Marion; "there is one other point — about your remaining on here? What do you wish to do yourself? I shall quite understand if you wish to go: though I don't in the least want you to, myself."

"Well, Miss ——" said Mrs. Grant; and stopped. She wanted information, not questioning.

"I'll tell you exactly how things stand," went on Marion quietly. "My plans are at present in complete disorder. Two or three things may happen: but I am afraid I ought to say that the probabilities on the whole"— she stopped —"No: I really don't know that I can say that. I think the best thing I can say is that you will be doing me a real kindness if you will at any rate remain for the present. But, if you have any permanent position, equally good, offered you, I think I ought to advise you to take it."

This was pretty vague, thought Mrs. Grant. Well; it was what she was herself.

"Thank you, Miss," she said.

"Well: shall we leave it like that?"

"Thank you, Miss."

"Will you say the same thing to Jenny?"

"Yes, Miss."

"Then I think that's all," said the girl.

It was a certain relief to Marion to contemplate spending most of that morning in business. For, first of all there were all Maggie's papers to be gone through, in accordance with the lawyers' information.

There was a bureau in Maggie's old room — supposed in the owner's lifetime to be very private and important; but never yet had Marion seen any of the drawers locked.

Naturally, therefore, it was not locked to-day; and in a few minutes all the drawers were laid out on the floor, with their contents, released at last, beginning to overflow and slip over the edges.

Marion had never seen such confusion in her life. Bills, letters, picture postcards, pamphlets, and receipts, sometimes fastened together, and more frequently loose, presently began to litter the floor; and, for two hours, the girl did nothing at all but range these into coherent heaps. (She first laid on one side a leather-bound diary which she found in a top drawer.) Very touching and pathetic little details caught her eye now and again. There were a quantity of letters, obviously from the servant-maids to whom Maggie had ministered, occasionally annotated in her all but illegible hand.

"Very deceitful, poor thing!" was written on one. "She means well, I am sure," on another. "Send her mother *at once* to Ramsgate for a fortnight," on a third.

There was a paragraph cut out of a paper, very crumpled, and marked in emphatic side-lines, containing instructions as to Diseases of Parrots; there were numbers of little French cards, portraying saints and holy groups, fringed with lace-patterns: there were worn little books of devotion with their covers half off: there were two pamphlets by Anglican divines, marked all over with notes of exclamation and sarcastic comments: there was a small cardboard box, with a broken lid, crammed to bursting with hideous little medals made of white metal; there were beads from broken rosaries running perpetually about the corners of drawers as she lifted out their contents. Finally, with very real emotion that drove away the beginnings of laughter to which some of her other discoveries inclined her, Marion found a complete set of letters from herself to Maggie, written from Munich, from the more formal ones beginning "Dear Miss Brent," down to the excited familiarities of "Dearest Maggie"— all fastened together in a packet with green string, sealed, and labelled "From my dear child — Munich." These, surely, could be destroyed now. Still sitting on the floor she cut the string, scraped off the sealing-wax and began to read.

III

It is strange how human nature is, usually, far more profoundly touched by small things than by great. A war of continents means very little to the imagi-

nation: the broken toy of a dead child, a great deal.

By the time that Marion had finished reading, half an hour before lunch, she had at any rate made up her mind on one of her two great questions: and was aware how utterly impossible it was to contemplate any longer, even in theory, the acceptance of Maggie's legacy. There was no one dramatic instant in which she decided; yet, as she laid down the last letter, and looked up, with swimming eyes, she understood that the decision had been made.

For what had been brought before her, with a vividness which recent events and emotions had obscured, was the peculiar relationship that had existed even up to eighteen months ago, between Maggie and herself. For the last year, at any rate, she had been, so to speak, emancipating herself: she had found her own feet, or had thought she had; her star had waxed brighter and larger, while Maggie's had remained the same. She had become something of a personage; Maggie had abode in her lovable obscurity.

But eighteen months ago their relations had been very nearly those of mother and child. It was Maggie who had sent her to Munich and kept her there: it had been to Maggie that she come home, vacation by vacation; it was this funny, generous, tiresome, talkative, *dévote* woman, of abounding charity whom, little by little, she had come to regard lately with a kind of good-humoured patronage: she had laughed over her, though not exactly unkindly, with Max: her last view of her, before the shadow of death had darkened all false lights, had been one of anger and resentment for her interference. And yet if any human being could ever have had a claim to "interfere" with her, it was

surely Maggie. And, in the very act of that loving intervention, she had met her death.

There was a little while before lunch. She would not have to write to any one before the evening post. So, once more she went down into the garden to think out the consequences of her decision. She took with her the small leather-bound diary that she had set aside. On her way she met Maximilian on the stairs; she cried out a little, caught him up and went on.

IV

It need hardly be said that Jenny had an adoration for Miss Tenterden, resembling that of a dog for his master.

Jenny was very typical of her class. She was of the country, and regarded the town with awe: she was aged eighteen, therefore she was sentimental: her sex was feminine, and therefore the chances in any case would be that she regarded an actress with secret admiration. Evidently, then, Miss Tenterden, as a traveller and a town dweller, and an operatic singer, who said kind things to her now and then, was the proper object for adoration, if not for envy; and the humble Jenny was incapable of envying any one so supremely exalted above her own station.

It was not so inevitable, but it happened to be true, that Charlie also loved Miss Tenterden from afar — which usually meant from beyond the low yew-hedge, where he was perpetually moving about in his heavy boots and dealing with a clay soil.

These two, therefore, had many opportunities for observing their goddess — Jenny, as she passed by the

open door between the kitchen and the dining-room, preparing for lunch; and Charlie as he lifted his head from his cabbages so often as he thought the young lady was looking the other way.

First Jenny noticed that Miss Marion began by sitting down, with a little book in her lap and the cat, clasping her hands under her chin, and looking meditative. (Charlie would have corroborated this, if he had been consulted.)

The next change of attitude was that Miss Marion was reading the book, not indeed carelessly, but a little rapidly. The cat was gone from her lap. Jenny saw the flash of paper twice, as she paused at the open door, and peeped out.

Next, Charlie noticed that Miss Tenterden was reading very hard indeed. She was absolutely motionless, even when Maximilian came and rubbed against her.

It was Jenny's function to ring a small handbell at the cottage door to announce to those in the garden that it was one o'clock — for the ladies to come in to lunch; and for Charlie to scrape the mud off his boots on the top of his spade and to tramp off to his mother's cottage for dinner. At one o'clock she did this: and then noticed that Miss Tenterden was no longer sitting down, but, on the contrary, walking very quickly up and down the paved path with her hands clasped behind her.

Five minutes later Mrs. Grant rebuked Jenny for not ringing loud enough, and bade her go and do it again, and to go on doing it till Miss Marion showed some sign of having heard it. This time Miss Marion, still walking, did appear to hear it; for she waved to Jenny, and went on walking for a good five minutes

more, before, at last, they both heard her go into the dining-room.

There seemed to be delay after delay to-day. It was the vocation of the small handbell, having been rung at the cottage door, to be placed on the table in the dining-room for the purpose of summoning Jenny when the plates were to be changed. Yet minute after minute went by, and no summons sounded.

"Go in, child," commanded Mrs. Grant at last. "Miss Marion's forgotten to ring; and the pudding'll be burned."

"Oh! yes: come in," said Miss Marion, as Jenny appeared.

"Are you ready, Miss?"

"Ready? What for? Oh, yes; I forgot."

This was highly mysterious to Jenny. No book was visible as she took away the plates; it certainly was not absorption in any reading that had made Miss Marion forget how time was going on. After lunch Miss Marion again went into the garden.

V

Father Denny was often very drowsy after supper, and considered it quite compatible with zeal to doze for a few minutes then if he felt so inclined. In fact it was through this habit of his that he had been a little late, on the night of poor Miss Brent's funeral, in locking up the church; and it was through this same habit that he was even later to-night, for when he awoke at last, and looked, with the sudden alarmed alertness of a sleepy person, at the tin clock on his mantelpiece, he saw that it was nearly half-past nine.

This would never do: he had not said Matins and Lauds yet, either. However the locking of the church must come first: he seized his biretta and ran out.

His conversation with Miss Tenterden, of a few weeks ago, had lain more heavily on his mind than it is possible for any one to understand who has not known intimately the life of a Catholic priest in an English country-village. Not only does every soul count, but every soul counts for a great deal more than anywhere else, except perhaps in the Foreign Mission Field. For the eyes of the community, always quick in English villages, are simply searching when Catholics are in question. To each and every one is committed the honour and reputation of Catholicism.

Now Father Denny was a very earnest little man, and took his duties extremely seriously. He had inherited his position from another priest who was not so earnest; and ever since his coming had set himself, with endless conscientiousness, not only to gather his sheep, but to fold them with particular care. It had been an enormous satisfaction to him when these two Catholic ladies had taken the house next the church; and the satisfaction had grown steadily when he discovered that one of them was only too anxious and proud to take entire charge of the sacristy, and that the other was willing to exercise a general supervision over the music. There had been a perceptible increase of assurance in his walk and his voice six months after the arrival of Miss Brent and Miss Tenterden.

Then, suddenly, this appalling bomb had exploded: and he had been informed by Miss Tenterden herself that she intended marrying a Protestant without even

applying for a dispensation; in plain language, as he would have said, contracting a union that was not a marriage at all, and throwing off her faith to do so.

His first blind instinct had been to get rid of her at any price. If such appalling things were to happen, for heaven's sake let them happen somewhere else — but not in Standing. Yet how was he to do it? He had been informed of this under the strictest confidence — so strict indeed that he must not use his knowledge in any way; he could not hint even to Miss Tenterden herself, unless she deliberately opened the subject again, of how important it was that Standing should escape the scandal. For a few days he hoped that Miss Brent might solve the problem: but she continued to be so smiling and voluble and unconscious, that it was obvious that Miss Tenterden had told her nothing. The poor man, therefore, had nothing whatever to do, but to await the catastrophe in patience; for, from Miss Tenterden's manner, he saw that he had nothing to hope from her.

Then the second blow fell; and Miss Brent was killed.

There were mixed considerations here.

First he was extremely upset at her death, honestly, not only because it would be a dreadful trouble to get any one so energetic again to look after the sacristy; but because, in his way, he was attached to Miss Brent; that is to say, he regarded with satisfaction and pride this excellent example of the devotion of the female sex, and felt entirely confident that she, at least, would never behave in anything but an edifying manner.

There had been, however, at first one glimmer of light; and that, that it was just conceivable that Miss Tenterden now would leave Standing and go and commit

her crime somewhere else. Yet even this glimmer of light, it seemed, was being extinguished; since Mrs. Mulligan had told him that Mrs. Grant had told her that poor Miss Tenterden would never be able to keep up both houses, and that it was certain that the London flat would be the one to be relinquished.

It was an appalling problem: he woke with it on his mind; he went to sleep still pondering it: he made pauses, during his mass, of unusual length.

This evening he came out in some haste. It was necessary for him — or he thought it was, to lock the sacristy door; and, as the ingenuous architect had made no entrance into the church from the presbytery, it was further necessary for him to go right up the church to get at it.

He went swiftly; and suddenly gave a kind of yelp: for, as he was putting his hand on the book-rest of the top pew on the left, he felt something move beneath it, and simultaneously became aware that something white was looking at him from below.

"I beg your pardon, Father," said Miss Tenterden's voice. "I have been waiting for you."

"I — oh! well," said Father Denny. (He thought it might not be edifying to say that he had been asleep.)

"I am sorry to bother you, Father," said Marion without any further introduction; "but may I go to confession? Now. At once, please."

He stared at her. He remembered what he had said to her in the music-room. Then he led the way to the confessional, without a word, switching on the light as he went in.

CHAPTER VI

I

Max felt a little heavy and depressed as the motor whirled him up the last slope and he saw the chimneys of Farley against the sky. He wished it was not Saturday: there would certainly be guests, and he did not want to have to talk: he wanted to think. And yet he did not know, really, what there was to think about: his course was entirely plain, and must be followed. Thinking could only make it more difficult.

Norah, for a wonder, met him in the hall; and made haste to imply that it was quite by accident, in the unemotional way of sisters who try to be friends with their brothers.

"Ah! here you are," she said. "Had a good journey?" (They kissed.)

"Excellent, thanks. Anybody here?"

"Oh! yes: three or four. They're at tea. The Mainwarings are here," she added; "and the Pakenham-Flaxes. You remember the rabbit-people, don't you?"

"Oh yes," said Max.

Tea, however, seemed over by the time they got into the drawing-room. Only Sir Robert was there, staring out at the lawn, a fine, soldierly figure, with his hands clasped behind his back.

"Ah! here you are!" he said. "I hear you've been at the grouse. Did you have good sport?"

"Excellent, thanks."

"I say," said Norah, "you can look after yourself, can't you? Gerald wants me."

"That's all right," said Max, inspecting the inside of the tea-pot.

Sir Robert seemed very friendly and communicative as Max helped himself. He came and sat in a low chair that seemed altogether out of harmony, in its prim chintz dress and sedate appearance, with this bright-eyed ivory-faced old man that had such an air of strength. He watched Max with a kindly look in his face, and talked pleasantly and easily. Max felt rather flattered.

"You came straight through town, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Personally I like town in August. One really can have a little peace: one can get *Punch* in the smoking-room, and there really seem enough servants in the club, too. But you're going north altogether, soon, I suppose?"

"My people go in about ten days, I think," said Max. "But I'm not sure I'm going myself."

"Eh? How's that?"

"I think I may have to stop in town, after all. I'm not sure."

Certainly the tea was rather cold; yet, while it was not worth while ringing for more, it did not offer any great temptation to remain long over it. Max stood up after a cup.

"Where's everybody?" he asked.

"I saw Lady Merival going down to the gardens with Mrs. Pakenham-Flax," said Sir Robert, rising with him.

"Ah! you don't feel inclined for a cigarette?" said Max, thinking he had been a little too abrupt about his plans.

"I shall be charmed," said the General. "Let's go out: it's a delicious evening."

Certainly Sir Robert could be a very pleasant companion. Max always liked him; but this evening he felt for the first time that the old man found him a pleasant companion too, and there is no flattery more delicately soothing to a young man's vanity. By the time that they had gone half a dozen times up the terrace he felt that he would like to confide, not very much, but just a little, in this old gentleman. Guy's story about him appeared evidently false, in this genial presence.

"By the way," he said, rather abruptly. "I hope I didn't seem rude just now. The fact is that I haven't talked to my father yet about my plans: but I wonder if I might ask your advice."

"My dear boy," said the other, "you know how we old folks like to be consulted. It makes us feel important again."

"Well: it's this," said Max. "I want to do something. I feel rather an idle brute. You know I do nothing whatever, but hang about. And I was thinking of asking my father whether he couldn't put me into something."

"But this time of the year ——"

"Yes: I know. But I want to show my father that I really mean business. He thinks I'm a slacker, you know: which is exactly what I am. And I thought that if I went to him just when the shooting ——"

The old man put a fatherly hand on his arm.

"My dear boy: I understand perfectly — perfectly. And it does you credit. But what does your father think of it all? That's the point. Has he ever— well — criticised or found fault in any way —— ?"

"No: as a matter of fact it's at his own wish that I live as I do. I've been getting up the estate-work, and all that, as he wanted."

"But then why change? You'll have the whole thing to manage, one day, you know: and in these days the more a landlord knows about such things the better."

"I want to be independent," said Max.

"Ah!—— Why, here's Lady Merival coming!"

II

Lady Merival could be quite adroit, sometimes, in her obscure way: in fact her obscurity helped her. This time she sailed down on the two, herself convoyed by the three "rabbit-people" as Norah had called them — Mrs. Pakenham-Flax and the two Misses Pakenham-Flax, a talkative mother with two silent daughters whose hair had just passed out of the pig-tail stage. Yet, three minutes later — almost as soon as the greetings had been exchanged between Max and the guests — Lady Merival was gone again, practically unperceived. She had been taught in so stringent a school that her personality must be effaced, that she effaced it without any difficulty at all. She effaced it now, and went off to consult with Norah, who, she knew, would be on the look-out for her in her own sitting-room.

"Well?" she said, with her face twitching a little, as was her manner in anxiety.

"It's all right, mother," said the girl; "he's an old dear; and quite understood."

Lady Merival sat down.

"I don't know what your father would say," she said. "It would be too dreadful."

"Not nearly as dreadful as what he would say, if . . . if things really did go wrong," said the girl.

Lady Merival twitched a little more violently.

"You quite understand that you spoke to Sir Robert on your own responsibility, don't you?"

"Oh, yes," said the girl a little wearily.

"It was your own responsibility, you know, my dear. You spoke to me first. I never dreamed of it till you told me."

Norah nodded.

"Tell me again," said her mother: "you have no reason to think ——"

Norah grew a little impatient.

"Mother: I've told you absolutely everything I know. I know they write to one another. I know that they met in town — Gerald told me. I am perfectly certain, though I can't prove it, that Max stayed behind to see her, the night of her breakdown in Isolde. But I don't suppose for a single moment that he's — well — compromised himself in any way, yet. I think Marion would have shown some signs of it if he had. That's what I think, anyhow."

"It would be too dreadful," said Lady Merival once more.

"Well: I've done my best, anyhow," said Norah.

"If any one can get at Max it'll be Sir Robert. He really is an old dear, and very, very much cleverer than any one would think. And what an advantage to have such an excellent reputation."

Lady Merival suddenly snapped. It is a characteristic of weak natures that, in anxiety, they turn almost savagely, and quite without justification, on the nearest person who won't snap back.

"I hold you responsible for all the trouble," she said. "It was you who first brought her here — I mean."

Norah stood up. This was a little too much.

"That's not in the least fair, mother: you asked her to dine again and again yourself."

"Because you pressed me," retorted Lady Merival, suddenly resembling a handsome rat who bites.

Norah flushed.

"Well: it wasn't I who wanted the Pakenham-Flaxes here, anyhow! And if anything in the world could drive Max to desperation it's those two girls."

"That's not a proper way to speak to me."

Norah murmured resentfully; but said nothing coherent. Her mother rose, with dignity: but her curiosity was too keen to be resisted; and, at the door, she turned.

"And may I ask what you mean by saying they will drive him to desperation?"

"I should have thought it was obvious."

"I will have an answer, please."

"Well: I suppose you want him to marry one of them, don't you? I know they're harmless and respectable and . . . and rich."

"Well?" demanded the poor lady, still as angry as she could be, but desperately curious.

"Max isn't a fool by any means: he sees all that well enough: and it'll just make him cross."

Lady Merival swept out of the room disdainfully.

Yet these two admirable actors behaved at dinner as if there were nothing in the world between them: at any rate no coarse-fibred man would have suspected anything. But Norah, between her smiles to Sir Robert, perceived that Max did not sit between the two rabbit-girls, after all.

It was not until the next night that there was any further chance for a proper talk. Two or three times Sir Robert made an attempt; but somebody came up, or a gong sounded, and the day slipped by in the solemn futilities of a country Sunday. The guests seemed drearier than ever, thought poor Max, whose interior conflict was really considerable, in spite of his resolute decision that there was nothing to conflict about. Once Miss Tenterden's name was mentioned by Sir Robert at lunch, and Max listened with an attention he had paid to nothing else; but the old man only spoke kindly and shortly of the sad loss of her voice, and remarked that he had had a charming talk to her one evening at Farley, not so very long ago. Max noticed that Norah was listening too; but she said nothing. He caught her eye.

The smoking-room at Farley is close to the stone stair that runs down into the garden, and a few minutes before the time of the usual dispersal, Max, who had

been very silent all the evening, slipped out and went down for a stroll. As he reached the foot of the stairs he heard himself called.

"Ah! Going for a breath of fresh air before turning in? May I come, too?"

"Why: of course," said Max.

They walked without speaking for a few yards. The moon was just rising — the rim of a great yellow shield beyond the eastern hills; and, as it had been a few weeks before when Marion was here, the night was still and breathless and full of scents. They walked together to the same corner where the girl and the old General had stood. Then Sir Robert put his hand on the boy's shoulder.

"My dear boy," he said. "I am an old man. I want to speak to you frankly. May I?"

Max felt his whole being stiffen and instantly relax.

"Of course, sir," he said.

"I've been putting two and two together. My boy, you aren't going to do anything rash?"

"But, how ——? I don't understand," stammered the other.

"Your talk last night — about wanting independence; that's one thing."

A thought flashed into Max's mind. He also saw how two and two made four.

"Has any one been speaking to you?" he said. "About me, I mean."

"My dear boy! Does that matter?"

"Ah! Well, I suppose it was Norah. But I don't see how she knew ——"

"Listen," said the old man gently. "She doesn't

know. No one knows, except yourself. I can only guess. So can your sister. But she did speak to me; it's quite true. And I want to be of any service that I can. That is really all."

Then the repressed longing for advice burst up in the young man's soul — an instinct rather than a reasoned wish. His way was clear and he knew it: yet a confidant might make it easier to take it.

"Look here, sir: it's very good of you. But I've quite made up my mind. There's absolutely only one possibility, and I must do it. By the way, I suppose if you've guessed so much; or if Norah's been talking to you, you can guess who it is ——"

"Yes, I know who it is, and I understand perfectly; and I have every sympathy. I have heard from her, by the way."

"Ah —— !"

"Yes: just a day or two ago. But, of course, she neither said nor hinted at anything of this sort."

"What did she write about, if I may ask?"

"Why, nothing: just a friendly little note. I haven't answered it yet."

Max looked up inquiringly.

"It's rather difficult to know what to say, you know. She doesn't quite seem to understand ——" He broke off. "Well: may I speak frankly? I have every sympathy, as I said just now: but there is another side, you know. I wonder if you've thought of that? I wouldn't say a single word, of course, against that . . . that most charming and attractive young lady. I have nothing but the highest respect for her."

"Ah!" said Max, again: and again the old man

put his white virile hand for an instant on his arm.

"But there are other considerations, you know. Of course I have no idea how far the thing is gone."

"I think I'd better ——" began Max.

"No. Please don't say anything. Let me finish. It'll be easier. Let me just put it like this. We'll say that you are hoping to make this young lady your wife. Well: I want to know if you'll allow me just to put one or two points before you that perhaps you have not fully considered."

"Go on, please," said Max quietly. His heart was beating excitedly: but his will was resolute. Certainly he would hear; he might as well keep what reputation he could, for sanity and reasonableness. But he knew where his duty lay: and he meant to perform it.

"Well: first there's the fact of her profession. Now I must be absolutely brutal about that. I am quite aware that a great many young fellows of . . . of our class have done precisely what you are thinking of doing: but I've never known, personally, one instance in which the experiment succeeded. I daresay there are some: only I haven't come across them. Let us allow that there are some. Well: I think you would probably find that in such instances there has been a very long period — giving a kind of momentum — during which the family has become established. Such people can do almost anything, and yet recover. Now in the case of both your family and my own this is not so. We are, both of us, comparatively new. I daresay this sounds very snobbish and foolish to you: but, you know, there is a good deal in these social matters, underneath all the nonsense — well: I think you see what I mean: I am speaking exactly as I have already spoken to my own

son in another connection: I think you won't be annoyed? — eh? "

It really was impossible to be angry. The old gentleman spoke with such serene simplicity. Besides, what he said happened to be precisely true.

" Well," he went on, " that's one point. Her profession ——"

" She's left it," put in Max.

" Yes: I know. But, you know, it does remain. I am aware that this is what is called Worldliness in its very strongest form. But I've come to see, towards the end of a long life, that Worldliness is not altogether an unmixed evil. There really is something in Caste. At any rate it is a fact that we have to reckon with."

" Yes: I know," said Max, steadily.

" My dear boy; thank you for taking it so nicely. The next point is this young lady's own birth and upbringing. If she had been, really and truly, of your own class, I don't think the other affair — her profession — would have mattered very much — perhaps. But you know ——"

Max glanced, sharply and fiercely.

" Yes: I know what you are thinking. I am not going to say that, for one moment. I know perfectly well that in a very deep sense of the word she is a lady — most simple and good and unaffected: it is wonderful to me, on the whole, how she kept her head ——"

" On the whole? "

" Well, I withdraw that phrase. I cannot justify it. I will say, in every detail, exteriorly as well as interiorly. But, you know, birth and breeding must mean something, though neither you nor I can see how it does in this instance. But surely, in the long run ——"

It was very delicately said. Max's sense of offence found no crevice in which to fasten precisely. Besides, had not these very thoughts occurred to him, too, again and again? Did he not continually find it necessary, interiorly, to answer these very arguments?

"Well: I'll say no more on that point," went on Sir Robert. "But of course you see that's my difficulty about answering her note. It would be simply cruel to pretend that the loss of her voice makes no difference. It does make an enormous difference, and that's just what she does not seem to see."

"I don't quite understand," said Max.

"Why, my dear fellow, her voice was her appeal. No girl of her age is accustomed to receive the . . . the kind of homage Miss Tenterden has been receiving, unless she has some very exceptional gift. Well, Miss Tenterden, poor soul! no longer has that gift."

"That seems to me rather brutal," observed Max, a little tremulously.

The other made a gesture with both hands.

"Exactly. Most brutal. That is just what I mean. The world is brutal; and Miss Tenterden doesn't seem to know it. But you know she must learn facts, sometime. However — may I go on?"

"Please."

"Well. The last point is her Religion. Now I don't see how it's possible for you to understand what a tremendous difference ——"

Max interrupted.

"Look here, sir: I must betray a confidence. I can't help it. I know you will keep it as absolutely sacred. Miss Tenterden is going to give up her religion; at least she is not going to demand of me the promises that her

Church lays down as necessary. Doesn't that fact make a difference? "

"Ah," said the old gentleman. But he did not seem in the least disconcerted. "Of course that makes a difference one way: but it raises a further difficulty in another. I happen to know a good deal about Roman Catholics; I was mixed up in a case once. Well — if I understand you rightly, you mean that Miss Tenterden is ready — or rather that you understand that she would be ready, in case of necessity, to marry you without her Church's sanction. Is that right? And do you quite realise what that means? "

"How? "

"Well: she will be considered not married at all, by those of her own faith. She will lose every friend she has ——"

Max could bear it no more. One by one all his own torturing doubts — or the vast majority of them, at least — rose before him again: and he perceived that they were not mere fancies of his own, as he had sometimes hoped. Here was a man, famous in Europe — a type, not just of the ordinary superficial man of the world, but of the exceptional; a man whose name stood for a very high standard of honour and chivalry and even piety — the kind of man whom parents secretly, and sometimes openly, hoped that their own sons might resemble — putting into reasonable and well-weighed words the very instincts and arguments that, for himself, he had been striving with all his might to reject as worldly and ungenerous and mean. The conflict waxed higher than ever. He must smash it down, or he might yield.

"Look here, sir," he said, with a voice that shook.

"It's no good. I'm very grateful: but it's no good. I must go through with it. I have given my word. We are actually engaged to one another. I can tell you that, plainly, now."

"Ah! Is that so?" said Sir Robert gently. "I'm sorry."

He stood surveying the young man, kindly and tenderly, in the moonlight.

"There!" he said. "Then that's all I have to say. You'll forgive me, I know."

He held out his hand.

III

It is never good for any one to feel heroic, although it is impossible to believe that spiritual fact at the time. At the time, it appears to lend strength and encouragement; but it is a Dutch kind of courage at the best.

Max came down to breakfast feeling heroic — so heroic, in fact, that he had resolved to say not one word of reproach to Norah for meddling in his concerns. But his heroism deserted him when he caught her understanding and sympathetic eye resting on him two or three times, and instantly withdrawn so soon as he saw it. Certainly it was most confounded impertinence on her part. Besides, how did she know?

He got his chance, as the guests drove away in the large motor wagonette, just before the second post came in. Norah put her hand understandingly through his arm — an action he loathed. But this time he retained it till other people had cleared away.

"Look here," he said. "Come for a stroll. I've got something to say."

They were twenty yards up the grass before he opened.

"Look here," he said again, with an air, and a sense, of extraordinary restraint. "I hear you've been talking to Sir Robert. Isn't that so?"

Norah pressed his arm again.

"Yes," she said, in an artlessly low voice.

"Well: look here. If it made any difference I should probably be angry. But I assure you it doesn't."

"Max ——" she began.

"It's so entirely futile," he went on resolutely, "that I'm not even going to discuss it. But what I want to know is, How in the world did you guess anything was up?"

Then she was silent.

"Norah," he said, "if you don't tell me, I shall be really angry."

She laughed quietly; and the very assurance annoyed him.

"My dear boy — you won't like it. But you're as transparent as glass. You were a great deal too careful, for one thing, not to mention her name: and you were a great deal too attentive, when any one else did."

"Do you mean to say you noticed ——?"

"Why, of course I did," she said. "And then all that motif-playing in the music-room. You've never quite left off that."

"And you know how far it's gone?"

"Well — I suppose you correspond with her. It's exactly that that's so dangerous. With a girl of that kind, you know ——"

It was his turn to be amused.

"Ah! you aren't so clever as you think," he said. "Well: I suppose I may as well tell you. I've been engaged to her ever since January."

"Max! You don't mean that!"

"Indeed I do. Then you didn't guess that!"

She had withdrawn her hand and was looking at him aghast. His sense of heroism elevated him now above all mundane prudence.

"Do you mean what you say?" she asked.

"I mean precisely what I say. You've always been honourable: I'll say that for you. And I know you'll tell nobody."

"Max! That isn't fair."

"It's absolutely fair. You've pried and poked about. So I've opened the door."

"It's simply impossible," she said. "You can no more marry Marion Tenterden than . . . than a charwoman. It would just mean ruin. Why she's even lost her voice."

Then for once his sense of heroism really inspired him.

"Norah, old girl," he said: "you mustn't say things like that. I know you don't mean them. I know she's lost her voice: if anything, that's one more reason. Sir Robert was very plain about that — I mean that people wouldn't find her so interesting now. Well, do you think that now's the time for me to desert her too? She's a good girl — as good as gold — you know that as well as I do. There's not the faintest reason, except the very flattest kind of convention against it. I know they'll kick up the deuce of a fuss: but I'm not going to tell them yet. I'm going to make my plans first. And you've got to stick by me. I've no one

else. You've never thrown me over yet, and I know you won't this time. Will you? "

For answer her eyes filled with tears.

The second post was being laid on the hall-table as they came back ten minutes later. Norah had really broken down as she realised how much worse the matter was than she had dreamed — she had broken down, that is to say, so far as to cry a little quietly; for the news really did affect her considerably. The consequence was that Max felt once more almost superhuman in his loftiness of character.

It was not that he did not care for Marion. He really did. The thought of seeing her again, the fact that she had not made an appointment for this last week, really touched his heart. He had a very great tenderness for her indeed. But what was beginning to happen to him was that the light of common day was dawning and the illumination of the footlights had begun to wane. He still pictured her as she had been when he had first met her a year ago — a gallant, alert figure. He held to his determination to marry her, firmly and resolutely. No doubt, he had begun to say to himself, in a year or two they would stand to one another in very much the same kind of relationship as that in which most married couples found themselves after the same period. Meanwhile he must not behave like a cad.

He eyed the letters sharply as he came round the table with Norah following. He still was conscious of a sharp prick of disappointment when Marion did not write. But there was no disappointment this time.

He darted his hand forward and took up a letter addressed to him, lying apart.

"Yes," he said, in answer to Norah's pale look of inquiry.

He tore the envelope open. It was very short.

"Dearest Max,

"I want you to come down and see me next week. It's really important. All times are the same to me. You said you could come. Well, will you? And will you let me know when?

"Yours,
"M. T."

Obviously there was nothing sacredly private about this: and it would clench the information he had given to Norah just now.

"Here," he said, handing it to her. "See for yourself."

When she gave it back her eyes had an odd questioning look.

"Well?" he said rather sharply.

"Oh. Nothing," said Norah. "Thanks for showing it me. I suppose you'll go?"

"I shall go on Wednesday," he said with an air of decision.

CHAPTER VII

I

Again the morning star stood high over the Hertfordshire hills, and the apse-window glimmered over the garden, as Marion, again in her cloak and hood, came stepping out to see the dawn of the day that was to decide the whole of her future. Max was coming today: she had had a wire from him last night.

It was curious how this habit of awaking early had grown upon her. It had begun in those torturing days that had followed her disaster: she had lain awake, she had tossed to and fro; she had seen misery in every facet of life: then at last she had fallen asleep again, and awakened late, heavy and depressed. Now she awoke quietly, as if a nurse's hand had been put gently on her arm, into tranquillity. Usually she lay, thinking, but without perturbation; three or four times lately, when she heard the first calling of the birds she slipped out of the house, walked awhile in the garden, and presently returned.

For she was beginning to understand what an amazingly strange place a garden, or even the whole world, can be, when the influence of humanity is withdrawn. During the day it is all but impossible to find a spot, even in the deepest woods, that is not impregnated with man. Sometimes on a moor — on the roof of the world — she remembered — such a place could be found: sometimes in the heart of a wood, where a busy stream

talks to itself. Yet at night, and, above all, when night begins to yield to the dawn, that living loneliness can be found anywhere — even in the heart of a sleeping town. But, for her, the garden was enough.

This morning she came out just as the dawn-breeze was beginning to ruffle the leaves. It came and went by long sighs, as she walked up and down. First it rose in the heads of the tall limes that fringed the church on one side and the hedge on the other, like the sound of a thrush rising in the most delicate crescendo that can be conceived. Ten thousand light leaves aloft shivered a little and whispered, as that soft invisible hand went over them. Then, perhaps three or four times there was no more: it died as it had risen. But the next time it continued: it sank lower and lower till the whole garden was astir and the ivy itself shook in the breath of it. Then, again, silence fell.

Meanwhile the light was broadening.

The sky was by now of an opaque light blue, tinged with green: it was hard to conceive of the Morning Star except as a clear jewel set in enamel. But, so far the light could draw only subdued tints from the colours of earth. The very flowers were subnormal in colour; the yews with all their blackness glowed as through a very fine grey veil: the grass was of the tone of the very veil itself. The garden had that elusive quality of a garden remembered from a dream. A very light tinge of dew showed on the grass, bristling a little. The atmosphere, for all its paleness, was a clear illuminant: every blade of grass seemed detached and single, sprouting upwards from amongst the tiny black coils of earth thrown by a myriad worms: the few leaves, fallen since

last night, were already upright and rigid in the beginning of their journey underground. And, over all this tinted sketch of line and colour, breathed an air of delicious and indescribable freshness that tasted like spring water in the lips and throat, and quickened every sense.

II

It is strange, and yet evident, that the world has as many messages as there are those to whom these are sent. To the mourner a garden at dawn is a place of desolation; to the child, a terrifyingly delightful treasure-house of adventure; to the lover it is a secret chamber where Love walks. It was as this secret chamber to Marion.

For there had returned to her, not her past, but all that had given keenness to her past, expanding now into an unknown future. First, there had come back to her that which is the hardest of all experiences to describe — a consciousness of a Personality that is to other personalities as is the sun to the stars — a Personality difficult to grasp, even inconceivable it would appear to some natures, not because it is sub-real but super-real. (That, at least, is the claim that is made.) As to the Name of this Personality, there is a variety of opinions in the religious world: for Marion there was no question that the lamp seen through the church-window indicated His Presence beneath it in one manner, as the Morning Star was a symbol of His Presence in another manner in the world of Nature. Such a belief may appear foolishness to some who do not share it: a serious doubt concerning it would have appeared foolishness to Marion.

She dated the beginning of this revived experience to her terror in the dark church on the night after Maggie's funeral; for round every great Presence, as it approaches, hangs a veil of fear. It was an air to which she had grown unaccustomed; she had walked on lower levels and the high atmosphere caused her blood to tingle and her breath to fail. Yet it was an air which she had once known, so it was not all strange, and she quickly found herself again. Then had come her first walk in the early dawn: and there again she had penetrated a little deeper, finding that there is no such thing as loneliness to the soul that is beginning to understand what it is. Then, one after the other, had come two exterior helps — first the re-reading of her own letters, and the recovery, therefore, to some extent of her earlier point of view; and then that which was no less than a revelation — the reading of Maggie's diary.

Now this diary was not in the least remarkable in itself. Some of the impulsive irresolution that characterised Maggie in action, characterised her also in her self-communing. There were absurd details about the price of coffee; queries as to whether a glazed eye in a parrot signified any latent disease; emphatic reminders to herself not to forget certain matters which, judging from later entries, had been forgotten after all. There was all this kind of thing in it; but there was a great deal besides; and, chief among all the rest, was the expression of a passionate love for Marion herself, and a no less passionate gratitude for the extraordinary blessing which, apparently, she considered the friendship of Marion to be. It was this that had flung open doors to the girl as she read. She had known, indeed, that Maggie had loved her; but then Maggie loved anything

and everybody which she did not happen to hate: the cottage at Standing, Mrs. Grant, the smell of a garden, Rhadamanthus, the darkness of a church, the priesthood generally — the greater part, in fact, of both nature and grace — these things had appeared to Marion to occupy the same kind of place in Maggie's affections: there had seemed no distances or relative values; and it had been this opinion that had caused the girl to think the elder woman a little superficial, in spite of her lovableness. She had thought that Maggie had loved her as she loved everything else.

But, with the reading of the diary, the whole thing had fallen into perspective: there appeared two things, and only two, that stood out as supreme — God and Marion. . . .

Little by little then — or, rather, in great waves the tide had come back, flooding the girl's soul, as the sea rushes back over level sands. After all, it had not been long away: the ebb had begun in Munich, perhaps two years ago, and had gone out with the swiftness that promised as swift a return. She had thirsted, she knew now, yet she had not known how great had been that thirst, since the violent excitements of the stage had served to distract her. Now and again, as she had glanced at her soul, she had seen the parched levels and the unfruitful dryness; and she had turned away again to the joy of her art. Then her art had failed her, and, all but unknown to herself, she had yearned again for refreshment. When it came, therefore, she drank it.

One unsolved problem, and one only remained; and it's name was Max. It was unsolved; for, on the one

side she loved him — loved him passionately, indeed: and, in the other, he was not yet fitted into her new scheme. To continue the metaphor, he stood up in the flowing tide, and she could not tell whether he would be submerged, or himself swept along with it. Yet, so great was her assurance that all would be well, she was content to wait until she saw him. She must tell him what had come back to her; she must try to put into words this extraordinary experience; she even smiled a little as she contemplated the certain bewilderment with which he would receive it.

Ah! how puzzled he would be! How singularly incompatible, superficially, that is to say, appeared the two visions — Max in his honest breeziness, Max as she had first been drawn to him upon the Scotch moors, Max even listening to *Lohengrin* and thinking that he really was beginning to understand it — and this new astounding world that was opening to her, in which emptiness is crammed with life and loneliness with company! At present she could not conceive how she would express it. Yet it must be expressed. . . .

III

The dawn was brightening now; and the garden began to take on itself something of that air and scale of tints which a garden shows for about five minutes immediately after sunset. The colours were beginning to differentiate themselves. The spectator began to consider how evidently green the lawn was: how evidently pink the phlox; how brightly yellow the small sunflowers. A blackbird skipped over the yews and paused on the lawn, regarding this strange visitor with his head on one side; a violent scolding of sparrows from beneath

the eaves of the cottage began to hint that peace could not be expected to be eternal: a belated cock crew far away, and a chorus of sarcastic answers came back, ending with the shrill thin cry of that cock who, on such occasions, always answers across miles of sunlit air and closes the discussion.

The girl watched and listened with a distracted kind of delight, appreciating every detail: yet following her own train of thought; and that train of thought, in these moments, happened to be dealing with *Lohengrin*. It was her consideration of Max that had put it into her head.

Certainly the parallel was not perfect; but it seemed to her that she could make it fit.

Here indeed was an Elsa with the world gathering round her in storm, and not a friend to stand by her, unless her knight should come again, that knight who had already come, in fact, but in homespun, not in shining armour. All else had left her; she had not a friend in the world so far as she knew, since Maggie was dead; even her art had left her at last. These little garden-hedges and the walls of the tiny cottage were the boundaries of her world, unless her knight should enlarge them for her. There was not one living being, except Max, to whom she could open all her heart. She had written to old Sir Robert Mainwaring, in a reaction she had had last week — just a friendly, impersonal little note which, while it contained not one word of self-pity, was one cry for compassion, that her loneliness might be broken. He had not even answered; and she understood why well enough: he meant to tell her by his silence, no doubt ever so kindly, that she must not demand interest unless she could make herself in-

teresting. If, henceforth, she were to remain within her garden and house, the world would not know it. She had risen like a meteor, and, like a meteor, sunk again into darkness: she was already of the past; and yet, two months ago she had sung at Covent Garden. She had had letters, indeed, of condolence; but there was not one to which her whole heart answered: one had impressed her with its pathos; another with its courtesy; a third with its hopeless want of comprehension: but there was not one that even tempted her with a desire to answer with her own confidence. She was just alone — except for her Lohengrin; and to that Lohengrin she was bound now to put the question on which all must depend. Indeed she was to ask his name to-day — (he would come, not in a swan-boat but by the four-seven train) — she was to ask him, that is, to disclose what he really was. And what when she had asked it?

IV

Then, on a sudden, the inevitable thought came to her.

She had slipped off her shoes by now, and was walking barefoot over the delicious dew-laden grass, when the rim of the sun looked between the windmills and struck her long pale shadow into life before her as she walked. She turned and faced the sun, smiling; and saw how the world was alight. Where, before, had hung a veil of greyness on bush and grass, now sparkled a veil set with ten thousand diamonds: where, before, red blossoms had glowed like embers, now they burned like flames; where the dark foliage of yew and ivy had appeared in blots of sombre colour, now living trees stood in their place and living wreaths writhed up the wall. With a chatter of joy the blackbird skimmed back over

the churchyard wall; and a couple of finches began their sweet quarrelling in a high elm. The world had come back to life; and with it had come a sudden perception.

With one part of her being she desired Max so furiously that her heart shook; there pierced her with swift joy the knowledge that it was to-day indeed that she would see him, before that steady sun had moved across the cloudless heavens and gone down again behind her little house. He would come through that little house into this very garden where she walked; she would see him with that anxious smile coming across the grass to where she would await him: they would talk together again in that very place where they had talked so short a while before, in terms of time, such ages before in terms of experience. Yes: Maggie and Guy had gone to see the church: she and Max had remained here.

Yet she perceived now that there was some new chamber in her being where Max, at any rate, had not yet penetrated, and which yet was not unoccupied — a chamber whose existence she had indeed suspected in those old school-girl days of devotion and sentiment, round whose door she had hung wistfully, yet into whose heart she had never wholly come. And now the door was opening; or, at least, she knew it was no longer locked. There it was: she knew it now; and that she had found her way to it through sorrow; and that the bitter-sweet taste of loneliness had been the first sign of her approach to it. It was not until first her art and then her friend had been taken from her that she had cared even to search for it; and, behold! it had been here all the while.

And now the day was come on which all must depend. By the time that glorious sun had set, the ques-

tion would have been answered. She would show the door of her new home to her lover and invite him in, for he alone had a right to enter there. She would tell him what dwelt within and beg him to share it with her. And, if he understood, and entered, then even this world would have no more to give her. And, if not ——

She stood with her eyes half-closed, and in them her tears were gathering. Then she felt a soft body rubbing against her ankle; and her tears fell quickly as she stooped, caught up the little cat and kissed him. He was very dishevelled after a night out; but she did not mind that.

V

"Mr. Merival will be here to tea," said Marion nearly six hours later, as she went in to interview Mrs. Grant. "I want Charlie to drive in and meet him by the four-seven. He may possibly stay and dine: I don't know yet. Anything will do. And I shall want Charlie to drive him back."

"Yes, Miss."

"Will you tell Jenny to bring tea out into the garden at half-past four, just before Mr. Merival arrives?"

"Yes, Miss."

"Then I think that's everything for to-day," said Marion. She hesitated. "Oh! no; there's one more thing. Please keep Maximilian in the kitchen all the time that Mr. Merival's here."

CHAPTER VIII

I

Max was conscious of very conflicting feelings as he sat patiently in the governess-cart opposite Charlie, and observed the mouse-coloured back of the strong little Welsh pony, and his marked ears, progressing before him. Charlie, of course, with a dutiful mournfulness, pointed out the dangerous corner, coming out of the station-yard, where poor Miss Brent had met her death.

"And it was this very pony, sir," he said gloomily; "but it was Jim, my brother, not me, that drove him. 'E 'asn't been allowed to drive since, 'asn't Jim."

But the memory of Miss Brent's death took no particular part in his discomfort, except indeed, very indirectly. It did just occur to him — no more than that — that if, by any extraordinary development, his marriage did not take place, Marion would, so far as he knew, have no friend left at all. However, the marriage was, undoubtedly, to take place; so that consideration was beside the point. His feelings rose, rather, from the struggle between his heart and his head, or, to be yet more particular, between a section of his heart and the rest of him.

He still retained, quite strongly, and, at moments, even passionately, an affection for Marion; it caused considerable excitement to contemplate that he was actually driving to her house, in her pony-cart, at this instant. He pictured, when he was not otherwise engaged, the garden he would see presently, and the girl's

white figure coming to meet him across the grass. ("Miss Marion"— Charlie had observed —"she's ordered tea to be in the garden, I 'eard Mrs. Grant say.") Her personality still possessed for him a very clear and sweet attraction, not tumultuous, but yet strong: it was the kind of attraction of which he had been conscious on the moors and by the salmon-river in Scotland, just under a year ago. If all else had been clear, he would have contemplated his marriage without misgiving.

But all else was not clear. On the other side there rose up that mountain of argument which old Sir Robert had put into such tactful words. Again and again the young man had stormed against it, assuring himself that it was but a mass of empty snobbery and worldly prudence and convention; yet, when the smoke of his assertions had died away, the mountain was still there. It was a fact, however deplorable. Further, he had lost from the thought of her that particular glamour with which the operatic stage had gilded her earlier image — that glamour in whose light worldly arguments appeared as unsubstantial as he declared they were in truth. Life without Marion would certainly be dreary; but it would not be impossible.

Yet, to his honour it must be said that he did not flinch. He was as resolute as ever; he had won this girl's heart, and he had given her his own; his only discomfort rose from the contemplation of those chilly considerations whose claim he denied.

"Miss Marion," observed Charlie, half-way up the long hill, flicking away a fly from the pony's shoulder, "Miss Marion she don't play no more now."

"Doesn't she?"

"No, sir: she don't. She've got a cover over her piano. I see it through the window."

"Did you ever hear her sing?"

"I 'eard her singing up and down like: but Miss Marion she usedn't to sing songs much at any time."

Max perceived that Charlie was alluding to Marion's exercises.

"Ah! I expect you heard her practising," he said.

"Ah! I daresay that was it. Pity 'er voice is gone, ain't it, sir?"

"A great pity," said Max politely.

His heart quickened very distinctly when the pony began to trot down the last hill. He could see the roof of the cottage over to the left, among the limes. Again he wondered, though with scarcely a touch of curiosity, why it was that she had sent for him; and again he satisfied himself completely by the theory that obviously, now that Maggie was gone, she wished to discuss with him her own plans before the marriage. He was strongly in favour of her remaining here: there might be all kinds of small annoyances in town: for instance, he was quite sure that his mother would not invite her to Cheriton House, or, at the most, very occasionally indeed, now that she was no longer singing; she was no longer in any sense a lion: and it would be a little hard to explain this quite frankly.

All fell out as he had rehearsed. Jenny, who must obviously have been watching, opened the door, even before the cart had halted; and went before him through the little hall.

"Miss Tenterden," she said, "told me to take you out at once, sir."

He saw the golden gleam of the sunlit garden, even before he stepped out into it: and there was Marion, in white, rising from her chair against the roses, and smiling as she met his eyes.

II

"First of all," she said, "what train must you catch back? Will you dine here early, or what? (Stay a minute, Jenny.)"

"I simply mustn't," he said. "I had no idea you wanted me to, or I'd have made arrangements. I've sworn to meet Guy at my club at half-past eight."

She made no attempt to dissuade him.

"Very well. No, Jenny: Mr. Merival won't stop. Tell Charlie to be here in time to catch the six-fifty-eight."

"Very good, Miss," observed Jenny, and went.

"It's heavenly to see you again," he said, sitting down.

She smiled delightfully: she was already at the tea-things.

"Tea first," she said, "you must be thirsty after those two train-journeys. I suppose you lunched in town?"

She seemed quite resolute in refusing to discuss anything of importance until he had had tea: once he asked her whether there was anything particular she wanted to see him about; and she appeared not to hear. She was looking just as he expected. After all, it was only two or three weeks since they had met, though certainly a great deal had happened since then. She had just

the touch of a worn look about her eyes; but that was all: her voice was still hoarse.

"I'm not wearing mourning, you see," she said presently: "I can't bear it anyhow: and as, after all, Maggie wasn't actually a relation of mine, there's no particular convention that I should. How she'd have loathed it, too!"

"What a dreadful shock it must have been to you," he said.

"Yes," said Marion, quite quietly.

Now that he saw her again, every one of his conflicting feelings received corroboration and emphasis, but most of all those that bound her to him. He saw, or thought he saw, tiny indications of that social difference between them which he was striving to forget — indications so small that in Norah, for instance, they would have made no difference at all, yet, with his nerves already strung up to receive such impressions, he perceived them. They were ludicrously small; and in a few minutes he ceased even to remember them. (It struck him, for example, that her shoes were wrong in some way — he did not even know how.) In a few minutes these thoughts were gone, swept away on that tide of attraction to her which her personality caused in his soul. She appeared to him, now that he saw her, more than ever slim and boyish and gallant; her eyes laughed as frankly and humorously as ever: there was but a very faint element of seriousness in them; and that he attributed to all her recent troubles.

As he lit his first cigarette this reviving attraction broke gently out.

"Marion," he said again. "It's just heavenly to

see you again. And this garden fits you like . . . like scenery."

She looked round it slowly.

"I like to hear that," she said. "Do you know I've grown to love this place."

"I don't wonder," he said. "I . . . I think that suffering in a place always does that."

A look of real astonishment came into her eyes; and he realised that he had never since he had known her said anything to her quite like that.

"Why! How did you know that?" she asked. "I always used to find just the opposite."

"Oh! I don't know," he said rather shyly, slightly ashamed of his remark: really, he did not know how it had come into his head: it seemed to him scarcely quite the right thing to have said.

"But that's extraordinarily clever of you, Max," she said, with a new sort of look in her face: she seemed to be scrutinizing his mind. "You know you do say dreadfully good things sometimes!"

"Thank you very much," he said gravely. (Really Marion was an extraordinarily pleasant companion! What a gloomy ass he had been, recently.) "But I want to talk about you. Do you mean to stop on here — for the present? I've been thinking on the way down that it's probably the best plan. You won't be lonely? Where's the cat, by the way?"

She laughed.

"Yes: I shall be lonely. But I shall love it. I've learned such a lot lately."

"I'm thinking of having a talk to my father this week," he said. "They go north next week, you know."

"Ah! And you go too?"

"Well: I really don't know. It depends how he takes this affair — I mean about my profession."

She was silent. But he pursued his train of thought. It seemed to him he simply had to make some sort of excuse.

"I suppose my mother hasn't suggested your coming up there?"

"No."

Again he plunged.

"I simply daren't suggest it, you know. They'd be bound to suspect. Oh! by the way, I've told Norah. I had to."

She looked up sharply.

"What?"

"She'd half guessed. I had to do it to seal her mouth. She's quite clever sometimes, you know. I suppose she hasn't written lately, either?"

She seemed to have sunk into meditation again; but she recovered herself.

"Who? Norah? No." Then she laughed. "I'm not interesting any more, now, you know."

She said it without even a hint of bitterness. Before he could speak she went on:

"Max, I've got a confession to make: and I want to make it before I come to the real thing I've got to say."

"My darling, don't talk like that!"

"But I have: and it's really frightful. Max: you've not got tired of me because I can't sing any more, have you?"

The words hit something in his soul so hard and straight that he flinched and drew his breath.

"My dear girl; what in the world ——?"

"There: that's enough," she said. "It was dread-

fully selfish of me to ask it. But I had to. Besides, I'm just a little frightened."

Evidently she was not joking. Her face was a little paler: and the worn look in her eyes was deepened.

"Look here, Max: it's a long story. I want you not to look at me while I tell it. Put the box of cigarettes by you"— (she got up and shifted it swiftly) —"just go on like that. I shall . . . I shall break down if you speak."

"My darling!"

"No: I mean it. Now listen carefully, please. I simply can't say it again."

She shifted her chair a foot back, so that he could only see her at an angle: he could not see her face; only her white outline against the grass.

Then she began.

III

"Max, dear, I shall probably make you frightfully angry before I've done: but I want you not to say anything till the end. Then say what you like. I shall accept whatever you say without a word. You will be absolutely in your rights in deciding as you please. I have no rights at all. Yes: I know you want to contradict me: but wait. You'll see I'm right.

"Max: I've never talked to you about religion — not really, I mean. I've only talked about the top of it. That was because I was living on the top myself. But you know I haven't always lived there — at least I think not. I used to be what is called pious — really pious, I mean, as we Catholics use the word. Well: when I first met you I'd given up religion practically. Yes: I know I went to mass, and so on, even in Scotland: but

that's not everything. There's a great deal more than that.

"Oh! I do wish I could tell you what the Catholic religion really is — I mean in its heart. It's incredible how little people know about it outside: they think it's a religion of forms and ceremonies. If there's one single thing it's not, it's that. They're simply not the point, though of course we have a lot. But the thing that's underneath — what they call Having the Faith: that's . . . that's — I was almost going to say that's the frightful thing about it. Yes: I think that's exactly and literally the right word. It is, Frightful. It grips you: and it won't let you go. You can kick and scream and protest: but it's got you. You can think you've lost it; you can laugh at it: but you haven't lost it: you've only covered it up. And then something happens: you're left alone for a bit; or you lose a friend: or you're on your deathbed: and up it comes again — sometimes too late, I know: but still, up it comes.

"Well —— Ah! Max; don't look at me like that! Turn your face away again. I must finish; though perhaps you've guessed.

"Max: dear: that's what's happened to me. It's been there all the time; and now it's come again. I'm not in the least hysterical or sentimental about poor dear Maggie or anything like that. I know that sort of reaction too: but this isn't that sort. It's absolutely real.

"I can't tell you all the things that have led to it. It would take hours. It was partly the loss of my voice; it was partly Maggie's death: it was reading some old letters I had once written to her; and a diary of hers I found. But it was chiefly being alone here.

That was why I didn't want you to come last week. I wanted to hear what . . . well . . . what Silence had to say. You know that old saying — French, I think —' Silence is the Speech of God.' Well: it's true.

" Yes: I daresay you could argue about it: but there's no arguing with love: and that's what religion is. I know there's theology too; but I'm simply unable to argue about that. You see, to a Catholic, theology is obviously true. I could no more argue about it than I could argue about the alphabet. There it is! There's no more to be said.

" Well: but this isn't the point. The point is that I'm a Catholic. When I talked to you before, I was one too; I knew it was all true even then: only . . . only I didn't know that I knew it. I'm only thankful — yes, I really am — that I found it out before it was too late. One has just got to accept that fact. You may say it's just my education, or my blood, or my artistic temperament: I can't contradict you: though I must say the Church doesn't seem to me as artistic as all that! Anyhow, there it is.

" Now you see what follows.

" I told you before that I would marry you just as you liked — without the promises or anything else. I suppose I was mad — mad with pride or anger or something. Well: I'm not mad any more.

" Max: dear: I can't marry you except as a Catholic."

IV

Her voice ceased. Through his soul poured such a tumult that he could scarcely discern one thought from another. Now it was anger, now it was a kind of

wounded pride: now it was a sense of crushing pain. Yet over the surface of that volcano played other thoughts, as light as flame — and they were thoughts of relief that here lay what, subconsciously, he now saw to be a way of release. Yet, for the present, he was occupied with more elementary passions, roused by her nearness to him, by the charm of her presence, and by the humiliating perception that he was not, after all, absolutely first in her heart.

So soon as he was certain that she had finished speaking, he shifted in his chair so as to look at her. The creak of the basket-work sounded curiously loud in that still sunlit garden. His own voice was hoarse as he spoke.

"Marion! You can't mean it."

She leaned forward: and he saw a strange passion in her eyes.

"My darling! I would give the world to be able to say — No: I wouldn't. I wouldn't."— (She leaned back sharply, clasping her hands.) —"Well . . . Yes . . . I mean it with my whole heart ——"

"But . . . but you don't understand: you don't understand what this means."

She laughed lightly; but it came from a great depth.

"Understand! Why, Max dear: do you think I could say all that, without understanding? We've talked it out together — the garden and I, I mean — till . . . till it's as clear as the dawn itself. I understand perfectly what it means. I understand that it gives you back your promise, so that you can go away from here and never see me again, and yet that there will be no shadow of stain on your honour. There! is that explicit enough?"

He sprang up.

"You mean that? You mean that you can think it possible ——"

"Max, dear: please don't talk so loud. And please sit down. . . . Yes: I mean exactly that. I shall have no thought or memory of you except what is good and sweet. My darling; I love you dreadfully, you know: but . . . but I think I'm learning to love God too."

Again his mind revolved like a mill: yet, in its grinding the noise grew clearer as of a voice that said, "You are free! you are free!"

Then passion again rose and drowned it.

"Marion, my dearest: it's intolerable: it's intolerable. You . . . you haven't been fair to me."

"I know," she said softly: but he scarcely heard.

"You've . . . you've allowed me to think, all this time, that nothing should come between us. You . . . you explicitly said that the — what d'you call 'em? — the conditions or the promises, or whatever they are, meant nothing to you: and now you turn round and tell me you must have them after all. It isn't fair."

(She bowed her head.)

"Here have I been bothering and fighting and arguing ——"

(She lifted her head.)

"Yes: I have: I was going to tell you. Norah spoke to old Mainwaring — and he talked to me one evening — yes: last Sunday night. And . . . and I fought for you; and you never let me suspect —— What's the matter?"

She was looking at him with an expression which he could not in the least understand; but it gave one an

odd sense of shame. He made haste to beat down that shame.

"No: it isn't fair. You shouldn't have treated me like that. Either you shouldn't have let me think that everything was all right: or you should have stuck to it. It isn't fair to change. I was perfectly prepared to face anything: to . . . to go into business, though I simply loathe it ——"

She smiled straight into his face.

"There! Poor old Max," she said; "I've treated you abominably: and I apologise. But it's all over now. Try to forgive me. We can still be friends, in our minds, can't we?"

"I . . . I don't understand," he stammered.

"Yes, you do, my dear boy. You and I are just friends again. We've . . . we've agreed we both made a mistake. Lots of people do, you know."

"You mean you throw me over?" he began.

She stood up. He rose with her.

"No, of course I don't, my dear. There's no question of throwing over. I quite see that it's utterly impossible for you to make those promises; and you quite see that it's utterly impossible for me not to make them. So there we are. Circumstances over which we have no control ——"

"You're not treating me fairly!" he cried.

"And there's no question of that either," she said. "Fairness isn't a word between you and me. We're friends, you know."

He still wavered between a dozen emotions. Then he decided on dignity.

"Well," he said, "you seem to be able to treat it

very lightly. Personally, I can't. I feel it much too deeply for that "— (he really thought he did, too) — "It's a tremendous blow. I . . . I don't know when I've had a greater blow. I . . . I must go away: I'll write to you when I've had time to think it all over." Then once again his passion rose and his voice changed.

"Marion! do you really mean it? do you really mean ——"

"Yes; my dear. And so do you. Or you will when you've had time to think it over, as you say. You do forgive me, don't you?"

He looked at her again; but her face was as steady as a rock. There was even a touch of that old humour dancing in her eyes. Then he saw, out of the tail of his eye, the cottage door open and Jenny come out. By her, with his tail erect, marched Maximilian, contrary to instructions.

"Why: there's Jenny," said the girl. "It's not possible ——"

She glanced at her wrist-watch.

"Max," she said, "it's after the half-hour. How fearfully long we must have been over tea. Cart there, Jenny?"

"Yes, Miss."

"You really must go, Max. Jack's dreadfully slow up-hill."

She caught up the little cat: then she put out her hand.

"You mean it all?" he asked a little hoarsely, glancing at his gift to her as the kitten clawed for safety; and then back at her eyes.

"Every word."

"Then — I'll write."

He took her hand for an instant, so fiercely that she winced. Then he was gone.

V

She stood where he had left her, till she heard the wheels drive away, and, a minute later, the kitchen door shut. Then she quietly put the cat down. She had not meant Max to see the cat, lest it should be like a reminder. But no harm had been done.

Round her the garden was passing into the beginning of its hour of sunset glory. Once more, as in the dawn, the mystical glow was burning through the blossoms: the wind had dropped; and there was no sound but the tiny rattle of Jack's footsteps as he went up the village, and the murmur of the wheels: then these sounds too ceased abruptly as the cart turned the corner. In the pause that followed a pigeon cooed from the crown of one of the great elms that dotted the meadows beyond the stream — nine notes, the last broken suddenly. But no mate answered him; for she listened for the voice.

Then, without moving hand or foot, she lifted her eyes to where through the lancet glimmered the light above the tabernacle.

"Jesus! My knight! . . . I am ready now," she said softly.

THE END